

MARK TIDD'S CITADEL



CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

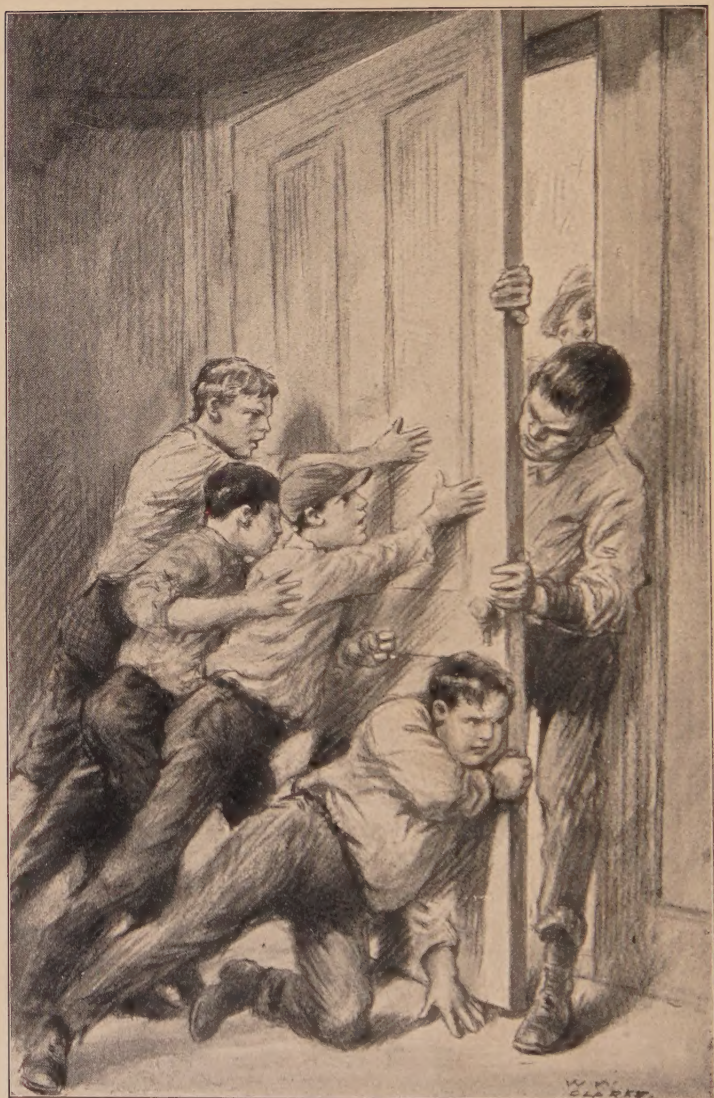




from David
Daisley

Sept - 1940

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LITTLE BY LITTLE THEY FORCED US BACK UNTIL ONE OF THEM
SQUEEZED THROUGH

MARK TIDD'S CITADEL

BY

CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

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"MARK TIDD IN THE BACKWOODS"

"MARK TIDD IN BUSINESS" ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE joke was on Mark Tidd!

All four of us, Mark, Plunk Smalley, Binney Jenks, and Tallow Martin, which is me, stood and looked at the big, ramshackle summer hotel and then looked at one another—and three of us grinned. Grinned, did I say? Maybe it started out with a grin, but it ended up with us rolling on the grass and yelling. For the hotel was closed tight, and anybody with half an eye could see it hadn't been opened for years!

The three of us who laughed didn't include Mark Tidd. He didn't laugh. He looked as if he was attending three funerals at once and trying to do his duty by all of them. He was flabbergasted—and that's the first time I ever saw him in that shape. The whole hundred

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and sixty pounds of him was flabbergasted. His little eyes looked sort of dazed; his jaw dropped till his fat cheeks stretched out almost thin, and he didn't have a word to say.

Was the joke on him? Well, I should say! Here he had brought us all the way from Michigan to Vermont to spend our vacation in this summer hotel in the mountains—and the hotel hadn't been running since Ethan Allen licked the British! Now I know why the driver who brought us over had chuckled so much, and why everybody else in the little town had seemed to know something funny that they didn't want to tell us as soon as we told them where we were going.

I don't blame them. I'd have laughed, too. Think of us out there at Lake Ravona, ten miles from town—and pretty nearly a million miles from Wicksville, where we lived. Think of us there, and then think about the hotel being shut up and ready to fall down—and us hungry and likely to keep on being hungry, with no chance to get anything to eat. It had cost each of us close to twenty dollars railroad fare to get there, and it would cost that much to get home again—with nothing to show for it. Why, the jokers at

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the grocery would never have done laughing at us! Life would be close to unbearable, and Mark Tidd's reputation for smartness would be hit so hard it would pretty nearly be a total wreck.

We three finished up laughing and waited to see what Mark would have to say. In a minute his face pulled back into shape and *he* began to grin, too. That was one fine thing about Mark—he was ready to own up when the horse was on him, and to laugh just as loud as anybody else.

"It l-l-looks," says he, stuttering worse than he had for a month back—"it looks l-like that advertisin' book wasn't quite up to d-d-date." He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a little booklet with a picture on the cover of it and began studying it. "Um!" says he, and then he sat down ker-plump and laughed so he shook all over like a plate of jelly. "Six years old. Six. Wonder how they kept it s-s-so clean in the depot."

We had found the book in the depot one day when we were down visiting with old Sam Clarke, the agent, and it had got us all excited by what it said about fishing and mountains and deer in the woods and such like. It

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sounded like about the best place in the world to go—and we'd never stopped to see when it was printed. Six years! The hotel didn't look like it had been run for twenty-six.

Even Mrs. Tidd hadn't noticed, and she is one of the most noticing women you ever heard of. She hadn't noticed, and she had liked the place as well as we did—so much that she got our mothers to let us go with Mark. Mr. Tidd was paying our expenses. He was rich now because he had invented a turbine engine, and, because we had helped a little once when some men had gotten his model away from him, he was going to send us all to college, and every little while he did something fine for us—like paying for this vacation trip.

"Well," says I, "what next?"

"Better climb back into the wagon and make for home," says Plunk Smalley.

Mark wrinkled up his nose and looked out at the lake. "D-don't exactly fancy goin' home like this," he says.

"Nothin' else to do," says Binney Jenks.

Mark turned to the man who drove us out. "Kind of a humorous feller, ain't you?" he says, and the man grinned, not mean, but

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like he was enjoying himself and wouldn't mind being right friendly.

"I calc'late to know a joke when I see one," says he.

"This is one, all r-right," says Mark; "but maybe we can pull some of the laugh out of it if we can get a good holt onto it. . . . Who owns this l-lumber-pile?"

"Man named Ames."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"Takes after you for flesh, and lets folks call him Jim," says the driver.

"Live in town?"

"Yes."

"Guess we better call on Mr. Ames then," says Mark. "Pile into the wagon, f-fellers."

"What's the idea?" I asked him.

"'Ain't g-got that far yet," says Mark.

That was the way with him. You couldn't get anything out of him till he was ready to tell you. You could ask questions all day without finding out a thing. So we got into the wagon and drove back the ten miles to town. The driver stopped in front of a big white house.

"This here's Ames's place," says he, "and there's Jim."

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A fat man was working in the garden. He was not only fat, but tall and wide across the shoulders. The fat was mostly in front and from his chin to his legs he looked just like a whopping-big egg. There was a cane hanging to his suspenders, I noticed.

He turned around to see who was stopping, and after squinting at us a moment through colored glasses he dropped his hoe, reached for his cane, and came hobbling toward us. He was lame. One of his legs—the left one—was stiff at the knee. He leaned on his cane and sort of balanced himself by holding his right hand on his hip. It made him come at you side on.

I was so interested in his gait that I didn't notice his face till he was close by. Then I guessed I knew why the fellows all called him Jim. He was the sort of man everybody would call Jim even if his name happened to be Methuselah. His face was red—not the way Mark Tidd's cheeks are red, but red like a box-car. He had three chins in view and I suspected a couple more hidden by his shirt. There was a little scraggly mustache—hardly enough of it to pay him for keeping it, and right above it was a nose. A nose, did I say?

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It was more like a monument. It was the kind of nose folks call a pug, but this was a grown-up pug. It had got its growth. If county fairs were to give prizes for the biggest pug noses Mr. Ames would have the world's championship. He had on a little linen cap that looked as if he'd borrowed it from some boy.

"Howdy!" says he, and smiled — no, grinned.

"Howdy, Jim!" says our driver. "Some boarders just come in from the Ravona House."

"Whoo-oo-ssh!" says Mr. Ames, and stared at Mark. "Didn't stay long, eh? Board didn't suit, maybe."

"'Twasn't the b-board, exactly," says Mark, "though I've seen a better t-t-table set. What we complain of is the crowds. We came to a quiet p-place. Didn't want to get in a jam. Soon's we saw folks elbowin' one another all over the p-place we decided we couldn't s-stay."

"Git out of that wagon," says Mr. Ames, "and set down."

We did, while Mr. Ames grinned at us like we were good to eat.

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"What d' you calc'late on doin'?" says he.

"'Ain't got no f-further than calc'latin'," says Mark.

Mr. Ames pounded on the porch with his cane and shouted: "Ma, here's four boys—and one of 'em special size—to stay to supper. Don't forget the pie."

That sounded pretty good to all of us, I can tell you. Twenty miles of driving with nothing to eat is enough to make a fellow dance a jig at the mention of a baked potato.

"Mr. Ames," says Mark, "we 'ain't never set anything on fire."

"No?" says Mr. Ames, wondering what Mark was getting at, I expect.

"Nor we 'ain't ever been arrested for doin' d-d-damage to property."

"You s'prise me," says Mr. Ames.

"And we d-don't want the whole town of Wicksville laughin' at us."

"Don't wonder at it a mite."

"We can c-cook."

"And eat," says Mr. Ames, with another grin.

"Folks say we can take care of ourselves."

"I'd take their word for it."

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"Then, Mr. Ames, will you rent us your ho-ho-hotel?"

Well, sir! You could have knocked me over with a feather. You could have done it with *half* a feather, and wouldn't have had to hit very hard, either. Rent his hotel! I thought Mark had been hit by sunstroke.

"Calc'late to run it? Calc'late to go into the hotel business?"

"Calc'late to l-live in it," says Mark. "Just the four of us."

"Hum! Occupy the whole thirty-nine bedrooms, besides the office and kitchens and dinin'-room and other parts of the buildin'?"

"We want the whole b-business. Don't want anybody else there."

Mr. Ames scratched his head and felt of his prize nose and eyed Mark and the rest of us. "Shouldn't be s'prised if we could make a deal," says he.

"How much?" says Mark, business-like as a banker.

"Calc'late to fish?"

"Yes, sir."

"Calc'late to ketch any?"

"If they're there."

"Rent 'll be five pounds of bass, live weight,

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to be paid every Thursday. I'll come after it." He pounded on the porch with his cane again and bellowed: "Ma, I've rented the hotel. Got the fixin's for four beds?"

"Got the fixin's for forty," says Ma Ames from the back of the house somewheres. "Attic's full of beddin' from that tarnation summer-resort place."

"There. . . . How about dishes and cookin'-tools, ma?"

"Barn loft's full of 'em."

"Want to move in right away, eh?"

"Yes, sir," says Mark.

"Haul you and your stuff out to-morrow. Included in the rent," says Mr. Ames.

Mark started in to thank him, and so did the rest of us, but it made him bashful and fidgety and you could see he didn't like it. Just in the middle of it Ma Ames called, "Supper," and in we went to one of the best and biggest meals of victuals I ever tried to get the best of.

CHAPTER II

NEXT morning Mr. Ames got us out of bed before a rooster had time to crow. He had the wagon all loaded and the horses hitched when we got down-stairs, and all there was for us to do was to pile on.

Ten miles is quite a drive with a heavy load, but it was still early when we pulled up alongside the porch of the big hotel. It made me sort of gasp when I looked at it. It was so big, and we were going to live in it all alone. Mr. Ames said there were thirty-nine bedrooms, and I expect there were about that many more rooms of other kinds. It was a funny-looking place, all bulges and bay-windows. It looked as if it had been built in a dozen pieces by folks whose ideas were a heap different. There were three stories to it, and almost every bedroom opened out on to a gallery or a porch or a balcony.

The whole of it stood on a point going out into the lake. Just off the end of the point

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was a tiny island with a little bridge across to it, and on that was another big building, where, Mr. Ames told us, there used to be a room for dancing, with bedrooms for the help up-stairs.

And that was all there was to it. As far as you could see there wasn't another building. Mr. Ames said there wasn't a cottage on the lake and that the nearest farm-house was four miles away. The woods came almost down to the shore of the lake, and all around it the hills bulged up a dozen times as high as any hill I ever saw in Michigan.

"Well," says Mr. Ames, "how does she look to you?"

"F-fine," says Mark; and we all agreed with him.

"Boats in the boat-house yonder," says Mr. Ames. "Need paintin' and calkin', I expect. I put the fixin's in the wagon, so if you want a boat you'll have to tinker one up."

"It 'll give us somethin' to do," says I, for I like to carpenter or meddle with machinery or mend up things. "That 'll be my job."

"I'll see you settled," says Mr. Ames, "and then git back to town."

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He helped us carry our things inside. Some of the stuff we piled in the big, dusty, cobwebby office to be taken care of later. The bedding we took up-stairs after we had selected our rooms. We took two bedrooms. Plunk Smalley and I were in one and Mark was in the other with Binney, because Binney was smallest and would leave enough room in bed for all of Mark. The rooms were right over the office and were connected by a door. There was a door out of Mark's room on to a big round porch right on top of the main porch of the hotel. They were dandy, pleasant rooms.

We put in most of the day cleaning up the rooms we wanted to use and fixing up the big range in the kitchen. We expected to cook most of our meals outdoors, but there would be some days when we couldn't and that range would come in handy. It was quite a job, but when we were through our bedrooms and the office and the dining-room and the halls and kitchen were as clean as they ever had been. By eight o'clock we were plenty tired and ready for bed. Then we made a discovery that was going to be important before we got out of that country—mighty im-

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portant. We didn't have a candle or a lamp or a lantern!

"Better hustle into bed before it gets d-d-dark," says Mark; and up-stairs we scurried.

In about two jerks we were undressed and between the sheets. For a minute everybody was still, and right there I began to feel spooky. I got to thinking of the long halls and empty bedrooms—and the ten miles between us and town. It wasn't comfortable. It seemed like it got pitch-dark in a minute, and then the wind, which we'd been too busy to notice, started to blow around the hotel and make noises.

I reached over and felt of Plunk to be sure he was there, and I caught him in the act of feeling for me. He felt the same way I did.

"Kinda still, ain't it?" says I.

"I wouldn't mind if a brass band was to start up under the window," says he.

In the other room we heard Mark and Binney begin to talk.

"Git over," says Binney; "two-thirds of the bed is yours fair and square, but I ain't goin' to sleep danglin' over the edge."

We heard Mark wallow over.

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"Seems to me there's l-lots of things rattlin' and b-bangin' around," says Mark.

"Is the door locked?" says Binney.

"Wasn't any key," says Mark.

"Maybe," says Binney, "if we was to move a chair or somethin' against it it wouldn't rattle so."

I knew Binney wasn't worrying about the rattling, but was doing a lot of thinking about keeping out anything that might be prowling around, and I nudged Plunk. We sort of giggled at Binney, but I guess both of us felt the same way he did.

"Go on to sleep," says Mark.

We were all quiet for a spell, and then Mark began to snore. He wasn't the nervous kind, and even if he had been a mite timid he'd have slept just the same. I never saw such a fellow to eat and sleep.

Well, we laid there in the dark, listening, and after a while I dozed off. All of a sudden I waked up with Plunk clutching the side of my face.

"Hush!" says he.

I hushed all right and listened. At first I couldn't hear anything, but then I did hear a sound. Thump! Thump! Thump! it

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went. Then it stopped and started over. Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Hear it?" whispered Plunk.

"Sure," says I. "Be still and listen."

Pretty soon I was sure I heard something soft-footed come sneaking along the hall. I held my breath and listened with all my might. Whatever it was, it came along, breathing so you could hear, and stopped by our door and sniffed. Then it sounded just as if somebody said, "'Shhh!"

"I'm goin' to see," says I. "Layin' here waitin' to be bit is worse 'n bein' up and gettin' bit."

I jumped out of bed, with Plunk right after me, and rushed across the room. Right in the middle of it I ran into somebody coming from the other way, and down we went in a kicking, punching heap. Scared? Say, I thought I'd just naturally scream. I guess maybe I did let out some kind of a yell. Whatever I'd run into was pretty lively and thrashed around considerable. All of a sudden I realized it was fat—mighty fat.

"Mark Tidd," says I, "is that you?"

"Wough!" says he. "What you wanderin' around at night like this for?"

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"Same to you. This is our room, ain't it? Was that you sniffin' outside our door?"

"No," says he. "I heard it and g-g-got up to see."

"Come on, then," says I.

We untangled and made for the door. I grabbed it open and looked out. The hall was as dark as a pocket. The only light was a window at the far end that seemed about half a mile away. If anything had been between us and that window we could have seen it, but nothing was there. We listened. There wasn't a sound.

"Huh!" says Mark. "Guess it was imagination."

"Imagination nothin'," says I. "We wouldn't both imagine at once, would we?"

"P-p-probably the wind, then."

"Wind don't thump," says I.

We stood there and argued about it. Of a sudden Mark turned toward the stairs that led down to the office. "Feels like a d-draught," says he. "I shut the outside door."

"Maybe it blew open."

"It c-couldn't. I fixed it."

"Let's see, then," says I; and all four of us

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in our nightgowns and bare feet went traipsing down. The door was wide open.

Mark just stood looking at it without a word; then he took hold of his ear and began to jerk at it like he always does when something happens that puzzles him more than ordinary. He went close to the door and looked at the catch as well as he could in the dark. It was all right.

"I shut the d-door and p-pushed the bolt," says he.

"Then nobody could have got in from outside," says I.

"Not through the door," says he. "B-but it looks like somebody went out of it."

"What I heard was an animal," says I, "and animals can't push bolts—at least not outside of a circus."

"S-s-somebody pushed that bolt," Mark says, stubbornly.

"All right," says I. "Who was it?"

"I'd give a dollar to know," says he.

"Sure you locked it?" Plunk asked.

Mark looked at him like he does when somebody's said something ridiculous.

"That b-b-bolt was pushed," he stuttered.

"Well," says I, "we'll lock it now, any-

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how," and I slammed the door shut and pushed the bolt. "Now let's git back to bed."

"I don't like the idee of somebody sneakin' around this place while we're asleep," says Binney.

"Nor me," says Plunk.

I didn't exactly grin with joy at the thought of it myself, but what could we do about it?

"Let's set a watch," says Binney. "Take turns."

"Shucks!" says Mark.

But Binney stuck to it, and Plunk sided with him. So did I. We drew matches to see who would watch first and I got the short one. The other fellows piled into bed and I wrapped myself up in a quilt and sat in a chair, shivering and pretty lonesome, I can tell you, especially after the others went to sleep.

It wouldn't have been so bad if I'd had a light of some sort, but there wasn't any light—not even moonlight. So I just sat and wished it was time for Mark to get up and take my place. I almost dozed off when, way back in the woods, I heard a whistle. At first I didn't really know whether I heard

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it or not, but in a second it came again, and there was no mistaking it. Somebody was out there among the trees and he was whistling to somebody else. What did he whistle for, I wondered, and who was he whistling to?

I shoved up the window and stepped out on the balcony. The wind almost whipped my blanket off of me, but I hung on to it and looked all around. Right in front of me was the lake as black as a great big ink-blot; at the right was a bay; at the left was the shore and the road with the woods stretching back. I couldn't see a thing alive; in fact, I couldn't see very much of anything. Then I heard the whistle again, a little plainer than before.

I strained my eyes in the direction it came from and waited. I kept on waiting, and then almost before I realized it some kind of an animal rushed out of the woods and ran up on the porch and jumped against the door. Twice it jumped. Then it ran down on the grass and tore around to the back of the hotel where I couldn't see it. I couldn't tell what kind of an animal it was because I could scarcely see it at all, but it was big. It looked almost as big as a calf.

I got back into the room and shut down the

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window, because it felt safer to be inside when animals as big as calves were rampaging around outside. Just as I got in there was a whopping-big slam down-stairs and at the far end of the hotel. Just one slam, and then everything was quiet.

I wrapped up tighter in my blanket and sat out the rest of my watch. Then I called Mark and told him what I'd seen. I was tired and sleepy and cold, so, in spite of being pretty nervous, I fell asleep in a couple of minutes.

CHAPTER III

NOTHING happened the rest of the night. Whatever it was that had been prowling around the hotel didn't prowl any more. By daylight it all seemed like a joke. But it hadn't been any joke in the dark, I can tell you.

The cool air of that mountain lake made us hungry enough to eat the blankets off the bed, but Mark said that wouldn't be fair to Mr. Ames. He said no hotel proprietor liked to have his boarders eat the blankets except as a last resort. We built a fire in the big fireplace in the dining-room and it wasn't two minutes before we had coffee brewing and bacon frizzling. Binney, who was considerable of a cook, was fixing up some biscuits. So, you see, we didn't really need the blankets, after all.

"What 'll we do to-day?" says I.

"F-fix the boats," says Mark. "Got to have the n-navy in shape. Can't tell when

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war 'll b-bust out, and we can't have an enemy landin' on our coast. I calc'late we better have two dreadnoughts in tip-top fightin' condition."

We all went over to the boat-house. In it were a dozen clinker-bottomed rowboats, a couple of flat bottoms, and, bottom-up on two saw-horses, was the prettiest cedar canoe you ever saw.

"T-torpedo-boat destroyer," says Mark. "Have that to g-guard the fishin' fleet and carry messages."

We went at it like nailers. Anybody who thinks it isn't some job to fix up a boat so it won't leak just wants to try it once. We painted and calked and messed around all day, and then had only two boats in shape—not counting the canoe. We went at that first and gave it a thick coat of paint.

"May need it any m-minute," says Mark. "Best to be on the safe side."

At noon we knocked off and did a good business-like job of eating. We ate so much it made us sleepy, so we strung out under a tree to take a little nap. I woke up all of a sudden with the queerest feeling! It was just as if somebody had been bending over, looking

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at me close and I had felt his breath in my face. I jumped up and looked all around me. Not a thing was in sight. I happened to look down at the grass, and right under my eyes a couple of blades moved, first one and then the other. You've seen grass straighten up after you've stepped on it. Well, that's just how this grass acted—exactly as if somebody had stepped there a minute before.

"Mark," says I, cautious-like.

He sat up quickly.

"Somebody's been here looking us over."

"H-how do you know?" says he.

I told him about the feeling I had and about the way the grass straightened up.

"Hum!" says he. "Can't understand it. Who'd be so interested in us, eh? Who in the world could be p-p-prowlin' around this old hotel? 'Tain't natural. If this thing keeps on I'm goin' to look into it."

"You'd better look into it, anyhow," says I. "I don't like it. I don't like havin' folks parade around where I'm sleepin', and I don't like havin' 'em lean over and blow in my face. 'Tain't *safe*."

"Shucks!" says Mark, but you could see he was put out and worried by the way he

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reached for his ear and began to jerk it. He always did that when he was bothered and couldn't make head or tail to things.

The other fellows waked up while we were arguing, and we traipsed off to work again. Just in front of the hotel, where the grass was long, Mark stumbled. Then he stopped and leaned over to pick up something. Leaning over is one of the hardest things Mark does—there's so much of him he gets in his own way in front. He grunted like everything and stood up with what looked like a bone in his hand.

"Huh!" says he, and looks at me with a queer kind of expression. "Huh!"

"What is it?" says I.

He held it out. It wasn't a bone at all, though it looked like it was made of bone. It was pure white except that at one end, where there was something that looked like a handle, there were figures and funny curlicues carved, and down the whole length of it was a row of things that looked like the Hebrew letters in our family Bible.

"What do you calc'late it is?" says I, taking hold of it.

Mark had one end in his hand, and I had

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hold of the thing that looked like a handle. It was a handle. When I pulled it moved toward me, and there I stood with the most peculiar-looking knife in my hand that you ever saw. It had a straight blade more than ten inches long, and on the blade, which was new and shiny and polished, were more funny-looking letters.

I dropped it like it was hot.

"It's a dagger," says I, and I guess my voice sounded scairt.

"S-somethin' like that," says Mark.

"Maybe," says Binney, looking over my shoulder, "it's an Indian relic. Maybe it's been layin' here for a hundred years."

"Sure," says Mark, scornful as anything. "That's how it got so rusty and battered up. Probably laid in that identical spot since George Washington discovered the Mississippi."

"He never discovered the Mississippi," says Binney.

"He did just as much as that knife is an Indian relic," says Mark. "Look at it. S-shiny, ain't it? Polished, eh? Been taken care of. That knife hain't laid there but a few hours. Heavy dew here, ain't there?"

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Would 'a' rusted it some in no time. No, sir, whoever dropped that did it last night or to-day."

"Looks like one of them *souveneers* you could buy to the World's Fair," says Plunk.

"This ain't a s-souvenir," says Mark; "it's the real thing. I've seen those knives and swords and things from Turkey and Persia and such p-places, but they're cheap. Jest made to sell to folks. This ain't cheap. It's the real thing, I tell you."

"What do you calc'late it is? Turk or what?"

"Can't t-tell. Some such race owned it. Come from Asia or Africa, that's sure."

"Well," says I, "I hope the feller that dropped it hain't got another. I'd feel safer a lot if I knew he was just out of knives like this and couldn't get any more."

"Me, too," says Plunk.

"I wonder how a man in these parts came by a dagger from Asia," says Binney.

"We d-don't know," says Mark, "that it *is* a man from these p-parts. Maybe it's a man from Asia."

"'Tain't likely," says I.

"'Tain't likely a man from here would have

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such a weapon," says Mark, "and 'tain't likely anybody'd be prowlin' around this hotel, and 'tain't likely anybody'd be bendin' over Tallow when he was asleep—but s-s-some of those things are facts, ain't they? Well? *I'll* bet that if there's a d-d-dagger from Asia here there's a man from Asia with it."

"And an animal from Asia, too?" I asked, because there was some kind of a beast with whoever was skulking around last night.

"I wouldn't be s'prised to s-s-see a two-humped camel off of the Desert of Sahara," says Mark.

"It wasn't a camel," I says. "It was too little."

"It don't matter if it was the old crocodile of the Nile," says Plunk, "we've got to finish up those boats."

So we took along the dagger and crossed the little bridge to the boat-house. Mark put the dagger on a shelf just inside the door, and we all rolled up our sleeves and went to work.

"I wish I knew what it was," Binney said, after a while.

"You don't d-d-differ much from the rest of us on that point," says Mark.

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"Then," says Binney, "why don't you figger out a scheme to discover?"

Mark grinned. He liked to be appreciated. You'll notice Binney didn't ask me nor Plunk to think up a scheme. No, sir, it was Mark he asked. And Mark was pleased. He wasn't the least bit swell-headed, but he did like to have credit for what he did and for the kind of brains he had. He deserved it, too. I don't suppose there are a dozen boys in the United States with just the kind of planning, scheming brain that Mark Tidd has. He's always scheming. Just give him something to plot over and he's happy. If there isn't anything for him to plan about really he'll imagine something. Funniest fellow you ever saw.

"Suppose," says Mark, "this was a castle—the whole hotel. And suppose we was the g-g-garrison. Along comes an army of knights and men-at-arms to capture us." All of a sudden he got interested, his little eyes began to shine, and his fingers sort of twitched. His imagination was going. "Listen," says he, "don't you hear a trumpet off in the m-m-mountains? Sure. They're a-comin'. What 'll we do?"

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"Fight," says Plunk.

"Sure," says Mark, "but we got to have a plan of b-b-battle. We've got food and water to think of."

"Plenty of both," says I.

"Suppose the castle over there was s-s-surrounded. We'd have food, but we couldn't g-get to water. I'll tell you: we'd b-better fetch a store of food over here across the bridge. Then if it got too hot for us in the castle we could retreat and tear down the bridge and be pretty s-s-safe here. Eh?"

"Sure," says Binney.

"Come on, then," says Mark. "We'll divide the stores and f-fetch half over here in case of emergency."

Of course it was all just pretending, but it seemed mighty real with Mark telling it, and before we knew it we were all working like nailers to get the canned stuff across into the house where the boats were. It was heavy lifting, but somehow it was fun and as exciting as if hostile men-at-arms were actually coming down out of the mountains to attack us.

We got everything all arranged and sat down to rest.

"They can attack now any time they

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w-want to," says Mark. "We're ready for 'em."

"Huh!" says Plunk, "it looks like we did a lot of work for nothin'. It's all right to pretend, but here we've up and lugged about a ton of grub over here where we don't want it."

It did look as if Plunk was right, but now I come to think it over I don't know just how much Mark was pretending, and how much he was carrying out a plan he had in his head, and took that way to do it without getting the rest of us frightened. Mark always took the easiest and best and safest way to do things. Before we got away from Lake Ravona we were mighty glad Mark pretended we were going to be attacked that day, I can tell you, and we were mighty thankful he moved all that store of food across to the building on the island. If he hadn't done that I don't know how we would have come out, but, anyhow, we'd have had a pretty hard time of it, and a close shave.

"Now," says Mark, "l-lets get back to mending the navy."

I got up and stretched, and looked over toward the door. I happened to remember that Mark had left the dagger on a shelf right

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alongside the door, and without thinking I looked for it.

"Mark," says I, startled, "did you take the dagger?"

"No," says he, quick-like. "Why?"

"Look where you put it," says I.

Everybody looked. The dagger was gone. Yes, sir. It was gone right from in under our very eyes. Whoever was infesting the hotel had sneaked right up to us and got his weapon in broad daylight. It made us feel pretty cheap—and not very comfortable.

"Fine!" says Mark. "Next t-t-time I capture the enemy's weapons I guess I'll know enough to keep them s-s-safe."

You see he took the blame himself. That was his way, too. He wanted praise when it was due, but he never dodged the blame when blame was coming.

But taking the blame didn't mend matters. The dagger was gone. Worse than that, we knew the man who took it was near. Probably he was watching us that very minute. We drew closer together and looked all around. We went outside and looked, but everything was silent and deserted as if we were the only people on the earth.

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"It's ten miles to town," says Binney.

"Well," says Mark, "we've l-l-looked after ourselves before, and I guess we can m-man-age it this time."

But, for all that, there were four boys there on that little mountain lake who had their hearts right in their mouths ready to bite them.

CHAPTER IV

“**H**E knows we’ve stored our food over here,” says Plunk.

Mark shrugged his shoulders. “If that was all I had to w-worry about,” says he, “I’d start whistlin’ a tune.”

He walked to the door and stood looking out for quite a while. Finally he turned around and asked if anybody had seen a strong rope lying about.

“There’s a big coil of half-inch rope upstairs,” says I, “and a pulley alongside of it.”

“F-f-fetch it down,” says Mark.

It took two of us to carry it, and when we got gown with it we saw Mark outside staring at the little bridge. We stared, too. It was about two feet wide, and maybe twenty feet long, all in one span. The far end of it connected with a board sidewalk just as it did on our end.

“Fetch a saw,” says Mark.

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Binney found one inside and Mark began sawing in two the timbers at the far end. He stopped and motioned to us.

"Scatter around and keep m-moving," says he. "Go as if you were l-looking for something. I want to chase away Mr. Mysterious Visitor so he can't see what I'm doin'."

I was curious to know what he was up to myself, but all the same I hurried off with the others and we scurried all over that side of the lake. We ran here and there and up and down and sideways. If there was anybody around I'll bet we kept him moving so busy he didn't have much time to see what Mark Tidd was up to. In about an hour Mark whistled our whistle which meant to come back, and back we went.

At first it didn't look as if he'd been doing anything, but when I came to look close I saw he had cut through the timbers of the bridge on the shore end, and had driven a big staple in on each side. On the island end of the bridge he had cut through the timbers just the same, but had hitched them together again with a couple of whopping old hinges. I couldn't see any sense to it. Mark grinned and pointed up. There, to one of the timbers

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supporting a balcony, was attached the pulley with the rope running through.

"See?" says he.

"No," says I.

"D-drawbridge," says he. "Every citadel has 'em. In case of attack we hitch the rope to the staples on the other end of the b-b-bridge and yank. Up comes the bridge. There's t-twenty feet of water, and deep water, too, between us and the enemy."

"We won't ever be able to lift it," says I.

"I calc'late we will," says he. "Got it r-rigged so we could."

He took us up-stairs to the balcony and showed us how he had made a weight of an old piece of iron pipe. When we wanted to pull up the bridge all we had to do was hook it to a loop in the rope and drop it off the balcony. Mark said it was heavy enough to lift the bridge alone, but that if we were in a hurry we could pull too and yank her up in jiffy.

"And now," says he, "l-let's eat."

The rest of us were willing enough, and while I built a fire the others went to peeling potatoes and one thing and another. We had flapjacks, too. Mark had learned how to fry

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them in a pan and flip them over in the air just like a regular camp cook. Whee! but they were good. We ate till there wasn't even a streak of batter in the bottom of the dish.

"Where do we sleep?" Binney wanted to know.

"S-same place," says Mark.

"Goin' to set watches?"

"Sure."

We went to bed in the dark again, for we hadn't been able to get any lights. Mark took the first watch. Not a thing happened, he told me when he woke me up. My watch was just the same—not even a suspicious sound, and it was the same with Plunk and Binney. All that night the fellow who owned the Turk dagger, if that's what it was, gave us a rest. It made me sort of hope he'd gone away.

"We've got to begin thinking about Mr. Ames's fish," says Mark in the morning. "Two of us better fish till noon, while the other two watch camp."

"We'll draw straws," says Plunk.

We did, and Mark and I were the ones to fish. We took one of the clinker-bottomed rowboats, though the paint wasn't quite dry.

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It didn't leak much. Each of us took an oar and we trolled with two lines. First we made a sweep down the far side of the lake, and inside of twenty minutes I'd landed a three-pound bass and Mark was fighting with a pickerel that weighed four pounds and a quarter when we got him into the boat. For ten minutes the fish let us alone; then Mark hitched on to a regular old sockdolager of a bass, and, after a quarter of an hour of about as busy fishing as anybody ever did, we got him into the boat. He weighed just short of five pounds. Mark dropped a lead sinker down his throat to give him a little more heft, and weighed him again.

"Guess we made a m-mistake first time," says he. "Look! He weighs f-five pounds and an ounce."

"That's right," says I. "Gives Plunk and Binney a mark to shoot at. Five-pound bass ain't biting every hook that dangles in the water."

"Calc'late we got about enough fish, eh?"

"Enough to pay Mr. Ames and more'n we can eat besides."

"Then," says he, "l-let's take a look around."

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We rowed about a mile down the lake toward the road and got out.

"Wonder if anybody ever passes here," I says. "Let's wait and see."

The road didn't look like it was traveled over as much as Main Street in Wicksville, and I didn't very much expect to see anybody unless we waited all day. But Mark liked the idea of trying, so we hid among the underbrush and pretended we were a scouting-party from the castle. We talked in whispers and were pretty cautious, I can tell you, for Mark said that part of the country was swarming with foraging parties of the enemy. He said they'd either shut us up in a dungeon fifty feet deep or else sell us into slavery in a far country if we got caught.

We laid there half an hour, maybe, and were just about ready to give it up, when Mark shoved his elbow into my ribs and says hush in my ear. I listened. Sure enough, I could hear somebody shuffling along the road. We held our breaths and waited. In a minute a man came in sight. He was a short man, and looked sort of funny even at a distance. Somehow he didn't look American. When he got closer we saw he wasn't American, but some

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sort of a foreigner. He didn't look like he was used to wearing American clothes, for they didn't set natural on him. About ten feet behind him came another man that looked enough like him to be his twin brother. They were sort of dark, but I knew right off they weren't Indians, and their eyes were black and different from any eyes I'd ever seen. I wondered what country they could have come from.

They didn't say a word, but just mugged along as if they'd been walking a long ways and had quite a ways to go yet. When they were out of sight I whispered to Mark:

"Italians, d'you think?"

"No," says he, thoughtful-like.

"Not Indians," says I.

"No," says he.

"What then?" says I.

"Can't quite make out. Did you notice their eyes?"

"Yes," says I.

"Sort of s-s-slantin', wasn't they?"

"Yes," says I.

"What race has slantin' eyes?"

"The Chinees," says I.

"Yes," says he, "but the Chinees have pig-tails."

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"Maybe these have under their hats."

"No," says he. "I n-n-noticed when one of 'em took his hat off. I calc'late," says he, "that those men were from Asia all right, but not from China. My guess is they were Japanese."

Well, sir, I remembered some pictures in a book home—one of these travel books—and those men did look just like Japanese. I guessed Mark was right.

"But what would Japanese be doing way up here in the mountains?" says I.

He shook his head. "More'n I can guess. . . . Just like it's more'n I can guess what a dagger from Asia or Africa would be getting lost near our hotel for."

I can tell you that startled me. I hadn't seen any connection between the two men we saw and the dagger, but right off I began to think there might be some.

"But that dagger was Turk or somethin'," says I.

"I dun'no'," says he. "It was from Asia, all right, but it might as well be from Japan as anywhere else, so f-f-far's I can see."

That was so.

"Do you suppose those Japanese men were

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the ones that were monkeying around the hotel?"

"No," says Mark. "I don't believe there was but one man in the hotel. Those two l-l-looked like they came from a long ways off to-day."

"I wonder if they work around here?"

"D-don't believe it. Somehow Japanese don't fit into the scenery here. Let's follow after those f-fellows a ways."

I was willing, so, cautious as Indians, we trailed after the two Japanese. It was better than pretending we were scouts. There was excitement about it, for we didn't know what those men might do if they discovered we were spying on them. Yes, sir, it was better than any game. I guess doing the real thing is always better than playing you're doing it, just the same as eating ice-cream is a lot more fun than pretending you are.

They walked pretty fast, and never looked around, but for all that we didn't take any chances. Always we kept close to the side of the road so we could duck into the bushes if they showed signs of being suspicious, and as much as we could we kept just around a turn of the road from them. That was pretty

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easy, because the road was as full of turns as a pretzel.

We'd followed them maybe twenty minutes when I saw the first one stop and hold up his hand. The other one stopped, too. Then, so quick you could hardly follow them, they dived into the bushes.

"Huh!" says I. "Funny way to be actin'."

Mark didn't say anything, but gave me a shove over the ditch into the underbrush.

"They heard something comin'," says he, "and d-ducked because they didn't want to be seen. Now I know they don't work around here, and I'm pretty sure they came here for some purpose. They don't want folks to know they're here, that's what's the matter with them. They know folks in this part of the country would get curious if they saw a couple of Japanese wanderin' about."

"I wish," says I, "that I could get that dagger out of my head. It ain't a pleasant thing to think about when you're out here in the woods with two full-grown Japanese a-hidin' close by."

Mark grinned a little. "We figgered on a n-n-nice, quiet summer," says he.

"Looks like we weren't the kind of folks

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that get quiet summers," says I. "We hain't had one lately."

In five minutes a rickety old farm-wagon came along. It was what scared the Japanese out of the road, all right. We didn't show ourselves. It went banging past, and, as soon as it was safe, we poked out our heads. The Japanese weren't in sight. We waited, but they didn't come. We waited some more, and some more after that, but not another sign did we see of them. It didn't give you a pleasant feeling, I can tell you. We didn't know where they might be sneaking in the woods behind us.

"I'm goin' back to the boat," says I, "and I'm goin' to row out into the middle of the lake. It's safe there. Nobody can crawl up on you when you ain't lookin'."

Mark grinned again. "That s-s-sounds good to me," says he. "I've got a creepy feelin' at the back of my neck myself."

CHAPTER V

WE got home with our fish just as Plunk and Binney were getting ready to eat. They had cooked dinner and waited for us until they couldn't stand it any longer. Mark and I were perfectly ready to begin, too.

After lunch we made a live-box to keep our fish in. It wasn't a first-class live-box, but it was enough to keep the fish from getting away. We made it by piling stones in the water close to the kitchen door, and when it was done we took our fish off the string and dumped them in. One was dead and one wasn't very lively, but the others seemed as good as new. We skinned the dead one and the poorly one and rubbed salt on them to have for supper. Binney and Plunk pretty nearly let their eyes pop out when they saw Mark's big bass.

"Guess that 'll pay our rent for a week to Mr. Ames," says Plunk.

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"Hope he'll enjoy eatin' it as m-m-much as I did catchin' it," says Mark.

"What 'll we do this afternoon?" Plunk wanted to know.

Mark wrinkled up his nose and squinted. "Seems to me," says he, "that we d-d-don't know as much about this hotel as we ought to. L-let's explore it from cellar to garret. If anybody's got a hidin'-place here we want to find out about it."

That did seem like common sense, so we all turned around and went into the office. From there we climbed the main stairs to the second floor and then to the third floor.

Well, sir, we went through every room on that floor, and every room on the second floor and every room on the first floor, and from one to the other of the basement, and not a sign did we see of anybody. More than that, we didn't see anything to show that anybody had been there for half a dozen years. There was plenty of dirt and rubbish and cobwebs, but that was all. It made you feel sort of spooky, especially when you *knew* somebody had been there, and most likely had been *living* there some place for goodness knows how long. Mark Tidd looked pretty

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glum. Somehow, not finding anything seemed to upset him more than as if we had run on to something we didn't want to find. He didn't say a word, but just walked off to a corner of the porch and sat down. Pretty soon he began to whittle, and we knew that something would be happening shortly. Whittling is about the last resort for Mark Tidd. When everything else fails he sits down and whittles. Let him whittle for half an hour, and you can bet something will come of it.

While he was whittling I walked over to take a look at the big fish in the live-box. I could see the smaller ones, but the whopper wasn't in sight. At first I thought he was hiding in the shadow or had wedged in among the stones, but after I poked around with a stick and couldn't make him budge I began to get frightened. Frightened is the right word, and you would know it was if you had a five-pound small-mouthed black bass and it looked as if he had escaped.

I got down flat and looked as hard as I could, but Mr. Bass was gone. There wasn't a doubt of it.

"Fellows!" I yelled.

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Something in my voice told them that everything wasn't going as it ought to, and they came running, even Mark Tidd.

"What's the m-m-matter?" he puffed.

"Big bass got away," says I.

Mark scowled and shook his head. "Couldn't get away," says he. "No f-f-fish could get out of that live-box."

"A fish did get out of it," says I, sort of provoked at him, "and if a fish did get out that proves a fish could get out, doesn't it?"

"Huh!" he grunted, and began looking careful all around the place. In a minute he stood up, and there was the funniest, most startled, hit-all-in-a-heap expression on his face that you ever saw. He held something up between his thumb and finger. It was a silver dollar.

"S-sure," says he in a minute, "the f-fish got out, Tallow. He got out and l-left this dollar to pay his board. Nice fish, wasn't he, eh? Because a f-fish *did* leave a dollar proves a fish can l-leave a dollar, eh? Good argument, Tallow."

"Some of us dropped it," says I.

"I didn't have a silver dollar," says Binney.

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"Neither did I," says Plunk.

"Nor me," says Mark.

Well, that left it up to me. I did have a silver dollar—just one—and I felt in my pocket for it. It was there.

"I've heard of the goose that l-l-laid the golden egg, but I never heard tell of a bass that laid a s-silver dollar," says Mark.

"I don't b'lieve, and nobody's goin' to make me b'lieve, that fish left a dollar," says Plunk, who didn't always see a joke as quick as he ought to.

"But there's the dollar to prove it," says Mark, without a smile. "And he l-left it on purpose, 'cause it was wedged in and held there by a l-little stick. The bass must 'a' got out on land and f-f-fixed it up that way so we wouldn't miss findin' it."

"All I got to say," says Plunk, with a mighty solemn expression, "is that if fish in this lake can leave silver dollars behind 'em, I hain't goin' to do a thing but fish from now on."

"Good idee," says Mark, "but I calc'late nothin' but five-pound bass can do the trick. And five-pound bass hain't very thick. Might try it, though, Plunk."

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"What do you make of it, Mark?" says I.

Mark was still peering around, examining the place as close as if he expected to find some more dollars. He got down on all-fours and looked at the ground, and then he sat back sort of contented-looking and self-satisfied.

"The b-bass was taken by somebody that wasn't very big—smaller than Binney, I should say, but heavier. He probably needed somethin' to eat. He was afraid of b-bein' seen, so he couldn't *ask* for it, so he took it, and, bein' honest, left what he thought the f-fish was worth to pay for it."

"Hum!" says I, sarcastic-like. "What color were his eyes?"

"Black," says Mark, as quick as a wink, "and he carried a club with a knob on the end of it."

"Yes," says I, sarcastic again, "and he had two arms and two legs and parted his hair on the left side."

"If you ever see him," says Mark, "you'll f-f-find out he doesn't part his hair at all."

"Rats!" says I.

Mark just grinned as provoking as could be. "If you'd use your eyes, Tallow, you wouldn't n-need to be told so much. L-look here."

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He pointed to a footprint in the mud. "Little, hain't it? Smaller 'n Binney's. Here, Binney, step alongside."

Binney did and his foot was half an inch longer than the mark in the mud.

"And l-look here. Here's where he knelt down. Here's his toe and here's his knee. See how far apart they are. Whoever left the mark was some shorter 'n Binney. And the club. Right here you can see the mark of it with his hand gripped around its middle. Knob on one end, hain't there?"

Mark grinned at me malicious-like and I guess I looked sheepish. That was what I got for making fun of him. I might have known he wasn't guessing.

"How'd you know his eyes were black and that he didn't part his hair?" says Binney.

"I don't *know* that, but I'm willin' to b-bet a cooky I'm right."

"Well," says Plunk, "if he's smaller 'n Binney I dun'no's I'm so all-fired afraid as I was a spell back."

"Maybe," says Mark, "he's one of those savage African dwarfs and he's got his war-club. How about that, eh? Like to meet one of those dwarfs, Plunk?"

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Plunk looked blank for a minute, but this time he got it through his head that Mark was joking, and said ha-ha sort of weak and doubtful-like.

"Tallow," says Mark, "the f-fact that a fish is gone don't prove anything but that a fish is gone. Remember that. It may come in handy."

"And *you* remember," says I, "that every time you see a summer hotel advertised it doesn't mean that the hotel is still running." It was the best I could think of just then, and if I do say it I think it was pretty fair. Mark thought so too, I guess, for he says:

"You've got me there, Tallow, so we'll call it quits."

We walked around to the front of the hotel and sat down on the porch. Mark was tossing the dollar up and catching it, and all of us were thinking about it, I expect.

"I guess we'll have to lock everything up if we want to keep it," says Plunk.

"It 'll be better to l-l-lock up the fellow that's doing the sneakin'," says Mark.

"'Tain't so easy," says I. "If he ain't easy to *see* I don't guess he'll be easy to catch."

"And," says Binney, "it might not be so

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much fun catchin' him—with his club and that big dagger."

"That sounds sensible," says I. "Let's try to get a look at him before we do anything else. Then—maybe we'll want to move."

"*Move!*" says Mark Tidd, his forehead getting wrinkled and his jaw shoving out. "You can d-do as you want to about that, but I *stay*. We've a right to be here. The other fellow hasn't any right. I d-don't care if he's b-b-big as a house and savage as a Hot-Hot-Hot—" He stuttered over that word and just *couldn't* get it out.

"Hot cross bun," says I.

Mark paid no attention, but went on stuttering, "Hot-Hot-Hotten-tut-tut-tot."

"And that's the way we spell Hottentot," says I.

"I'm here," Mark says, "and I'm goin' to stay. We've a *right* to be here."

When it came to standing up for his rights Mark Tidd was the stubbornest boy that ever was. He just set like concrete, and the only way to move him was to blast him away. I suppose that's the way to be. The Revolution was fought by men who were stubborn about standing up for their rights, but I've

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noticed that's the kind of fellow who wears a black eye oftenest and has most lawsuits. Personally I'm for *conceding* a little before I get into a rumpus.

"But," says Mark, "I'm as anxious to get a peek at our visitor as you are."

"Only fair," says I. "Trade him peek for peek. He's peeked at us often enough."

"Probably he's peekin' at us now," says Binney. But as it turned out, he wasn't—not just then.

CHAPTER VI

“WHEN ’LL Mr. Ames be out?” Plunk asked.

“Let’s see,” says I, “this is the second day we’ve been here. It ’ll be five or six days before we can expect to see him.”

“So,” says Mark, “you’ve either got to s-s-stick it out till then or walk to town.”

Plunk sort of flushed. “I wasn’t thinkin’ about gettin’ to town,” says he. “I was hopin’ he’d remember to fetch a lantern or somethin’ to give us a little light.”

“Send him a wireless,” says Binney.

“Or—” Mark began, but he never finished what he was going to say, for the biggest sort of a barking and snarling and yelping started up in the woods not farther off than you could throw a stone, and all of a sudden something flashed out of the underbrush and came scurrying toward the hotel. We all jumped to our feet.

Then something else burst out of the trees

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and tore after the first thing that came. By that time we had sort of collected our senses and could tell what was going on. It was a big, black dog chasing some littler animal that seemed to bump and waddle and roll along, but made a pretty fast gait at that. The dog was barking as hard as he could bark.

About fifty feet from us he caught up with the little animal and made a jump for it. Well, sir, you never saw anything so funny in your life. The dog no sooner touched the little animal than he sat right back on his haunches like he was too astonished to live, and let out the dismalest howl you ever heard. *Yip-yip-yi!* he yelled. The little animal didn't run any more, but kind of curled up and waited. We went running over to see the fight.

"What is it?" says Binney.

"Porcupine," says Mark.

He was, and a fat old whopper, too, with enough quills on him to satisfy a dozen dogs. But this dog wasn't satisfied. After he got over his surprise he seemed to get mad, and in he tore again. I expect he figured the porcupine had hurt him by mistake. But

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he found out different. Mr. Porcupine sort of humped up his back and you could hear his quills rustle. Mr. Dog shoved his nose into them—and then pulled it out quick.

He was one disgusted dog, and I'm telling you that something besides his feelings were hurt. He looked as if he were trying to grow some funny sort of mustache. At first he didn't know what to make of it; then he sat back and began to paw at his muzzle. He pawed and pawed, and when he found out pawing didn't do any good he took to rolling, and while he rolled he yipped and yelled. All of a sudden he remembered his dignity and stood up. For a minute he looked at Mr. Porcupine, and all his mad came back. It got the better of his good sense. He didn't seem to realize that the time had come to arbitrate, so he took another lick at the porcupine, who was just beginning to move off as if it figured its day's work was done.

This time the dog stuck to it as long as he could, but that wasn't very long, and when he backed off he did it with his whole heart. He backed off so hard that he sat right up on his tail for a minute and then rolled over backward. If he could have seen himself he'd

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have been so ashamed he wouldn't have shown his face for a week, like proud dogs do when something makes them look ridiculous.

He started running around on three legs and pawing at his nose with the leg that was left. Then he stuck his muzzle against the ground and began to spin around it in a circle like he was trying to *scour* the quills out. But anybody could see he was having hard luck at it. Mr. Porcupine looked over his shoulder like he wasn't so very much interested, and for all the world he looked like he was grinning. Then he started to move off slow. This time the dog jumped right on him with all four feet—and from that time on you never heard such squawling in all your born days. We were sorry for him. Anybody would have been, but he was so funny, and, while he thrashed around so there wasn't a thing we could do. So we just stood there and laughed.

But in a minute we stopped laughing, stopped sudden, too, I can tell you, for there, standing between us and the dog—almost like he had dropped out of the sky—was a boy. We had been so busy watching the dog and porcupine we hadn't seen him come or

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which way he came from. The first we knew there he stood with his arms folded, scowling at us.

He wasn't as tall as Binney, but he was broader. He looked strong—and for all his size, he looked sort of, well, I guess *stately* is the only word to describe it. He was foreign. His skin was dark, and his eyes were black, and his hair was black and straight—and it wasn't parted. I wondered how Mark Tidd had figured *that* out. He was angry, but for all of that, and for all his color and his foreign look, he was handsome. He stood there looking at us for a moment like he was making up his mind what to do with us. Then he said in just as good English as any of us could speak, only more careful, and sounding, somehow, as if he had to remember and take pains to find the words:

"You have hurt my dog. How dare you hurt my dog?"

The way he spoke made you sort of jump.

"It was the p-p-porcupine," says Mark, pointing to where the little animal was scurrying away. "Your dog chased it and got quills in his nose. We haven't touched him."

"You laughed at him when he was hurt."

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"Yes, and you'd have l-laughed, too. He isn't hurt much. The quills will come out easy, and in a day or two he'll be as well as ever—and have a l-lot more sense. He'll know better than to tackle another p-porcupine."

The boy looked at us, right in the eyes, without speaking for a couple of minutes. I don't remember ever to have had anybody look at me just like that. It was a sort of judge-of-the-supreme-court look.

"What are you doing here?" he says, when he got through looking us over.

Mark Tidd grinned that jolly grin of his, the grin he gets on when he wants to make friends or be particularly agreeable.

"Seems to me," says he, "it's up t-to you to t-t-tell us what *you* are d-d-doin' here." He was a little excited and stuttered like everything.

The boy looked puzzled. "Why do you speak like that?" he says. "I have not before heard English spoken that way."

Mark looked sort of taken back, and the rest of us laughed right out. The boy drew himself toward us and clenched his fists.

"You laugh at me," he said, taking a step toward us.

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"No," says I, "we were laughin' at Mark Tidd. The joke was on him. He stutters, you know."

"Stutters? What is stutters?"

"Why, talks like you heard him. He can't help it. It's a sort of—of a disease," says I.

Mark got red and turned on me quick. "It ain't a disease," says he, "and if it is it would do you g-g-good to catch it."

"Never mind that," says the boy, with a wave of his hand as if it didn't matter much, anyhow. "What are you doing here?"

"Havin' a g-good time," says Mark. "Not that it's any of your b-business. What are *you* doin' here? We rent this hotel and p-pay for it. We've got a right to be here. What right have you to be prowlin' around it?"

The boy stepped forward and spoke angrily-like in some foreign language. I guess he was mad and his English clean got away from him. He stopped of a sudden and says so we could understand:

"I will show you to speak with more respect—" Then he shut up quick and acted like he had let out something he didn't want to, and muttered to himself in his foreign language again.

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"We're just as respectful to you as you are t-t-to us," says Mark. "We d-don't have to go out of our way to be r-r-respectful to any boy. You might as well understand that on the start."

The boy looked surprised. "Are you noble?" says he.

"N-noble?" says Mark, sort of puzzled. Then he grinned. "D'you mean do we b'long to the nobility? If that's it I calc'-late we're as noble as they m-make 'em in these parts. I don't call to mind anybody that's nobler."

"Yes," says Binney, "any of us is entitled to be President of the United States—if we can get elected."

"Oh," says the boy. "I did not understand. I ask your pardon. I shall not again commit the same offense."

I didn't quite catch what offense he was talking about, but I guess Mark did, for he let on that it was all right as far as he was concerned.

"Say," says Plunk, "what nationality are you, anyway? Injun?"

The boy got so straight his back was like to bust and he looked as proud as the fellow

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who stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum.

"I am Samurai," he said.

"Don't recollect ever hearin' of 'em," says Plunk. "I've heard of Sioux and Pawnee and Iroquois and such, but Cooper nor nobody I've read mentioned Samurai."

"He m-means Japanese," says Mark, disgusted-like.

I guessed that myself, and had been wondering if he was the son of one of the men Mark and I had seen on the road that morning. I was just going to ask him when I thought I'd better wait and let Mark do the talking.

"You're a l-l-long ways from home," says Mark.

"Yes," says he, "a long way; a very long way."

"Alone?" says Mark.

The boy frowned, then he looked sort of undecided and uncomfortable. Finally he made up his mind to answer. "Yes," says he, "alone."

"Did you come way from Japan alone?" Plunk wanted to know.

"There are two ways to deal with a question

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one does not want to answer," says the boy. "One is to lie; the other is to keep silence. I do not lie."

"Um!" says I. "Guess that's bein' told to mind your own business."

"For a cent I'd take a punch at him," Plunk whispered.

"Best leave him alone. He might s'prise you," says I.

"My name," says Mark, "is Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd. My f-f-friends call me Mark Tidd."

"And mine," says the boy, "is—" He stopped a second. "You may call me Motu," says he.

"It seems s-sort of funny for a Japanese boy to be up here in the mountains all alone," says Mark, "and then added, sly-like, "dropping daggers and taking fish and prowling around at night like he was afraid of something."

"I can tell you nothing. I am here because I must be here. Here I must stay until—until something happens that will let me go away. That is all I can say."

"Um!" says Mark Tidd. "Well, Motu, I guess you'll f-find it more comfortable sleepin'

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in a bed nights than prowlin' around; and easier and more f-fillin' to eat with us than to skirmish up food for yourself. There's l-lots of room, and lots of f-f-food." He stopped for a bit, and then went on, more polite than I'd ever heard him, and as dignified as Motu was. "It will give us pleasure to have you as our g-guest."

Motu's eyes shone, and he smiled. "I accept," says he. "You do me a great kindness. I am a stranger, far from home, and I cannot repay except with thanks."

"In this country," says Mark, "thanks are good money to pay for hospitality with any time."

And that's how we found the fellow who was sneaking around the hotel and scaring the daylights out of us. It's how he came to live there with us, and it's how we started a friendship with him that got to be one of the things that we're proudest of of anything in the world. Besides that, it's the reason why things happened to us that weren't very pleasant while they were going on, but which were plenty exciting—exciting and some dangerous. It's how Mark Tidd got another chance to show what a head he's got, and

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what backbone there is in him—and, I'm glad to say, it gave the rest of us a little chance to, and we took advantage of it in a way that we aren't ashamed of. And in the very end it brought us something that pretty nearly surprised us to death—something that I don't believe ever was had by four boys in the United States.

On the whole, it was a good thing that Motu's dog chased the porcupine and caught him—though the dog didn't think so for a day or two.

CHAPTER VII

“WHERE have you b-been sleepin’, Motu?” Mark asked while we were trying to catch the dog to operate on him for porcupine quill.

“There,” says Motu, pointing to the hotel.

“But we searched it from one end to the other, and couldn’t find a thing.”

Motu smiled. “I show you,” he said. “I had a place not easy to find.”

He talked to his dog and after a while got close enough to him to hang on while we pulled out the quills. The dog yelped some, but we explained to him that it was necessary, and that he’d be a gone dog if we left him alone. Somehow that didn’t seem to do him any good, and after we were through he ran off and hid under the porch.

“Bring the dog from Japan?” Plunk asked.

“No. I found him back there. He was lost. He wanted to stay with me.”

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Mark nudged me and whispered. "Good sign. When you f-find anybody a dog'll trust like that it's pretty safe for p-people to trust him too."

It sort of surprised me the way Motu talked English. I supposed Japanese and Chinese always talked sort of funny like. "Me find li'l dogee back topside," or something of that sort, but Motu pronounced his words right and was that particular about his grammar that it made me sort of ashamed. So I asked him about it.

"How'd you learn to talk English so good?" I says.

"I have gone to school in England at school they call Eton. Also I am coming to school in the United States some day—maybe."

I saw Mark looking at Motu with a queer expression like he was speculating about something and was surprised and a little excited by what he figured out.

"I'll show you where I slept if you like," says Motu, and we followed him into the hotel and up to the second floor. Way back at the end of the hall he took us into a bedroom and then into a closet off the bedroom. There he got down on his hands and knees

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and crawled through a little triangular hole where the rafters showed. We followed him. It brought us into a little round place with the walls all sloping up to a point like a clown's hat. In the middle it was big enough to stand straight, and there was lots of room to sleep and keep things.

Mark looked around as well as he could in the dim light, for there wasn't a window—nothing but a few little holes in the roof.

"I know where we are," says he, satisfied with himself. "We're in the peak of that little t-tower just over the dining-room."

Motu nodded.

"How'd you ever f-find it?"

"My dog chased a little animal—a rat or a squirrel—into it. I followed to see where he went. It was a very good place. The sort of place I needed. Here I have lived."

"It's a dandy hidin'-place," says Mark, kind of meaningly.

"Yes," says Motu, as calm and cool as ice, but that is all he did say. There wasn't a word of explanation about it, or why he wanted to hide, or what he was afraid of, or anything. It began to look pretty mysterious to me and I wanted to talk it over with Mark.

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And there was that dagger, too. I didn't see it any place, and Motu didn't have it with him. Somehow I wanted to have *it* located.

"How about that dagger?" I asked right out.

Motu's teeth showed in a smile. I guess he was remembering how easy he had sneaked up and got it back from us.

"I have put the little sword in a safe place—where my careless hands cannot again lose it. I was in despair. I searched, but in vain. Then from the edge of the woods I saw the fat boy who is called Mark Tidd pick it from the ground. I was angry—yet I was glad. I knew where the little sword was, and I knew I should have it again."

"You might not," says Plunk, "if we hadn't left it laying around so careless."

"My father put the little sword in my hand. He said, 'Motu, I give you this to keep fresh the honor of our family. Let it never pass from your hands.' So I would have taken it again, even though it had meant much fighting."

It sounded like something out of a book, but I guess it was all right. Foreigners do odd things, anyway, and to a man that isn't

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a foreigner they act sort of crazy. Maybe they think *we* act crazy, and I expect if we were to go to Japan *we'd* be foreigners, wouldn't we? It looks like there was something to be said on both sides of the argument. Anyhow, my father never talked to me as if he was reciting something out of Shakespeare's plays.

Mark began to crawl out of Motu's hiding-place and we followed after.

"We've got p-p-plenty of bedding to fix up a bed for you, Motu," says Mark. "Come on and pick out your bedroom."

"Many thanks. Of the bedding I shall borrow some blankets, but the bedroom—it is best, I think, that I should sleep where I have slept."

"L-look here," says Mark, "if you're afraid somebody 'll see you—"

Motu held up his hand. "What is best for me I know. If you do not want me here I will go away."

"Don't go gettin' on your high horse, now. We're glad to have you, and we're not tryin' to p-p-pry into your business. Sleep where you want to."

"It's too nice a day to waste in the house,"

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says I. "I'm goin' outdoors and find some-thin' to do."

"Let's explore," says Binney.

"Good," says Mark. "P-pretend we're the first white men that ever got here to this lake. We want to settle here, but we dassen't till we know the l-lay of the l-l-land. Best way is to divide. One party go one way, the other party go the other, till we meet. How's that?"

"Fine," says I. "Calc'late we'll meet any savages?"

"It's Injun country. Most likely they c-come here to fish and hunt. We want to go pretty cautious."

"How'll we divide up?" says Plunk.

"You and Binney together, and Tallow and me. Motu can go with whichever he wants to."

"It is not best that I should go," says Motu. "Here I shall stay until you come back."

"All right," says Mark. "Whatever suits you."

So we started off. I looked back in a few minutes and Motu was nowhere to be seen.

"Motu's ducked," says I to Mark.

"Yes," says he. "He's got some p-pretty good reason for keepin' out of sight. He

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ain't the kind to be afraid of nothin'. If he's hidin' it's because there's somethin' to hide from."

"I don't like the whole business," says I. "First here's a Japanese boy all alone. Where'd he come from and what's he doin' here? Next that boy's afraid of somethin'. What is it? Then we take him to live with us. If there's somethin' that's like to hurt him ain't it just as like to hurt us? That's what I want to know."

"I'm s-sort of wonderin' myself," says Mark.

"Maybe he's just run away from his folks," says I.

"No," says he; "it's somethin' more serious than that. Maybe these Japanese have feuds like the Chinamen. It might be that."

"Yes," says I, "and it might be that he's been borrowin' chickens from the neighbors without askin' permission, and he's sort of bein' looked for on account of it."

"Shucks!" says Mark, disgusted as could be. "You can see for yourself that Motu isn't the chicken-stealin' sort. There's somethin' all-fired interestin' about him—you'll see."

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"Hope so," says I.

Then for a spell we didn't talk any, but went on through the woods, being careful to keep under cover on account of hostile Indians. We didn't sight any, but Mark saw considerable sign they'd left on their visits, and came to the conclusion that they used the lake quite a bit for one thing and another.

Pretty soon he began to sniff. He stopped and pointed his stubby nose first one way and then the other, and sniffed like all-git-out.

"Tryin' to play a solo?" says I.

"Be still," says he, "and smell."

I started in sniffing as hard as I could. Both of us stood there and sniffed a duet. Must have sounded sort of funny.

"Well," says I, "I calc'late I've sniffed enough for to-day."

"Smell anythin'?" says Mark.

"No," says I.

"Not smoke?" says he.

I started sniffing again, harder than ever. It's lucky I've got a good, well-constructed nose, or I'd have sniffed it clean off that day. But I got results. Sure as shooting I could get just the faintest whiff of a fire somewhere.

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"Must be right ahead," says I. "That's where the wind's blowin' from."

Mark nodded. "Got to see what it is," says he. "War p-p-party maybe. We mustn't be taken by s'prise. Come on as quiet as you can."

We got on to our stomachs and wriggled along like a couple of alligators, though I will say Mark looked more like an armadillo. Alligators run more to length than to thickness, but Mark ran to *vice versa* as you might say. We just inched along, and as we went the smell of smoke got stronger.

There was a little hummock just ahead with lots of bushes on it. We made for it, getting our faces and hands nicely scratched up, and went up it like a couple of snails climbing a roof—if snails ever climb roofs. Mark was ahead. When he got to the top he flattened down as much as he could, and it looked to me like he was trying to shove himself right into the ground. I edged up alongside and looked.

Maybe you think I didn't crowd the ground a little myself. I'll bet I made a dent in it that's there to this day. For not thirty feet away was a little fire with two men

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bending over it cooking something or other. Their backs were toward us and so we couldn't see their faces, but we could tell they were short and broad. One of them had on overalls and a hickory shirt. The other one wore shabby black pants and a gray flannel shirt. I wanted to say something, but I didn't dare even whisper.

We laid there as still as a cat in front of a mouse-hole and watched. After a while one of the men turned, and we could see his face. It was a whole lot like Motu's. A little darker, and not so intelligent or handsome, but of the same race, all right. Then the other one turned, and he was a Japanese, too!

They ate what they'd been cooking, and then talked a little in their funny lingo. After that one of them laid down and shut his eyes, while the other one sat up with his eyes wide open. It seemed to me I never saw anybody who kept his eyes open so wide, and I says to myself that I'd bet his ears were open just as wide as his eyes. He was keeping guard.

Right off I began to wonder why two Japanese in a friendly country should think it

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was necessary to keep watch like that. They must have had some reason for it.

Mark reached over and touched my leg and then motioned back toward the hotel. I nodded, and we began to wiggle away feet first like a couple of crabs. We went pretty slow and careful, I can tell you. I don't believe I drew a breath till we had gone a hundred feet, and my heart was beating so loud I was sure a man could hear it a quarter of a mile away.

We kept on going slow and easy till we were around a little bend in the lake, and then we legged it for home.

"Same ones we saw on the road," says I.

"No," says Mark. "You ought to n-n-notice things more. Those fellows were dressed different. Both of them had on blue suits. It was another two."

"Then there's four of 'em around," says I.

"And maybe more," says he.

"Why do you s'pose they go by twos instead of keepin' together?"

"Tallow, sometimes I don't b'lieve you've got anythin' to t-t-think with. If you was huntin' the country for somebody or somethin' would you go in a crowd, or would you divide

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up and scour the locality that way, maybe watchin' the roads, and that sort of thing?"

"I'd divide up, of course."

"Well?"

"What 're these fellows lookin' for?"

"What's hidin'?"

"Why," says I, "the only thing I know of that's hidin' isn't a thing, it's a boy and it's name is Motu."

"Yes," says he, "and I'll bet you a c-c-cookie that Motu is why these fellows are in the woods. They're boy-huntin', and Japanese boy at that."

CHAPTER VIII

“WE’D better hunt up Motu and tell him about these men lookin’ for him,” says I.

“I sort of calc’late from Motu’s actions t-t-that we wouldn’t be f-fetchin’ him any news,” says Mark.

“He may know,” says I, “that he’s bein’ hunted for, but maybe he don’t know the hunters are so *warm*.”

“They are tolerable hot,” says Mark, with an uncomfortable grin. “But I guess so long as Motu wants to mind his own b-busi-ness pretty strict, we’d better do the same. He knows what he’s up to.”

We got back to the hotel in a little while, but nobody else was there. We looked for Motu all over, but couldn’t find hide or hair of him. I guess as soon as we got out of sight he went and hid up. But it wasn’t long before Binney and Plunk came rampaging in, panting like a couple of grampuses, with their

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eyes bulging out and talk just spilling out of them in bunches. They both wanted to talk, and neither of them could manage it.

"Back there—" says Binney, and stopped to pant.

"We 'most bumped into—" says Plunk, and *he* stopped to puff.

"Lucky we was goin' cautious—" Binney says.

"Or," says Plunk, "nobody knows what—"

"They'd 'a' got us sure," says Binney.

"S-sit down," says Mark, "and breathe a couple of breaths and drink a dipper of water. Maybe by that time you'll both *'light*. You're f-floppin' around like scared chickens."

"You'd be a scared chicken if you'd bumped into what we did," snapped Plunk.

"Yes, sir," says Binney. "Why, before we suspected a thing we almost *stepped* on 'em."

"On who?" says Mark.

"Two of them Japanese," says Plunk.

"Where?" says I, getting pretty excited myself.

"Sittin' down back from the road about a mile up," says Binney.

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That made it sure it was two *more* Japanese. Our two couldn't have gotten where Plunk and Binney saw theirs.

"Then there's four of 'em," says I.

"Two, I said," Binney snapped.

Mark grinned, but there wasn't much *enjoyment* in that grin. "Don't calc'late," says he, "that you fellows have got any monopoly on seein' Japanese. We saw a c-c-couple ourselves."

"What?" Plunked almost yelled.

"Back there," says I, jerking my thumb over my finger.

"Motu's friends?" Binney asked.

"If they be," says I, "he don't appear anxious to see 'em, does he?"

"Are *they* why he's so partic'lar about keepin' out of sight?" Plunk asked.

"That's our guess," says Mark.

"You think they're after him?"

"Looks that way."

"Huh!" says Plunk. "Looks like a lot of trouble to be takin' for one boy. S'pose he's run away from home?"

"He's run quite a ways," says Mark, as sarcastic as could be, "and he must 'a' s-s-swum the Pacific Ocean on the way. This

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ain't any runnin'-away-from-home scrape. It's s-s-somethin' serious, *I'll* bet."

"And *I'll* bet," says Binney, "that I wisht I was back in the State of Michigan."

"If there's four Jap men lookin' for one Jap boy, and they're as close to him as these men are to Motu, it looks a heap like they'd *get* him," says Plunk.

"I ain't layin' any claim to him," says Binney. "I dun'no' what I'd do with a Japanese boy if I had him. Them men can have him, for all of me."

"I guess you said that without doin' m-m-much thinkin'," says Mark. "Just figger if you was in Japan and four Americans that had it in for you was t-tryin' to catch you. S'pose you didn't have any friends and didn't know the country. Wouldn't you be just a *mite* glad if somebody was to give you some help? Eh? Wouldn't you sort of l-l-look at it as though it was somebody's *duty* to help you? Tell me that. What kind of a country would you think Japan was if nobody l-lifted a finger to help you? Pretty rotten one, I guess. Well, that's how Motu's fixed here. He's in a strange country, bein' chased by men that 'll do somethin' unpleasant to him.

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There ain't n-n-nobody to help him but us. It strikes me we can't get out of it if we wanted to, and, for one, I d-don't want to. 'Tain't a United States way of doin' things. I'm just tellin' you that if those men get Motu it 'll be b-because I can't help it. I'm goin' to stick to him just like I'd stick to one of you. Then he can't go back home and say the United States is no good, and that American boys can't be depended on. Now what about it? If you f-feel like pullin' out, go ahead. But I'm goin' to stay, and I'm goin' to enlist with Motu."

Nobody said anything for a minute, then Plunk got up and sort of stretched and felt of his neck and blushed and says, "That goes for me, too. I'm with Mark."

"Me, too," says I.

Binney looked pretty embarrassed. "I guess I didn't think much before I spoke," says he. "I didn't have it clear in my head. I'm with you, and Motu can depend on me just as much as on the rest of you."

"B-bully for you," says Mark.

Well, sir, something happened then that clean took the wind out of my sails. It was pretty embarrassing, but, come to look at it

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now when everything's over, it was sort of pleasing and satisfying, too. It was Motu. He stepped right into the middle of us, and held out his hand to Mark.

"I heard," says he, his eyes shining, but his face was calm and dignified and without any more expression to it than a buckwheat griddle-cake. I expect it's the Japanese way not to let your face give away what you're thinking about. "What you said to the others I heard, and what they said in reply to you. It was as Samurai boy should speak, first for the honor of his country, then for his own honor. You, Mark Tidd, are Samurai," he turned to the rest of us, with hands stretched out, "and you, too, are Samurai. This story shall be told in my land, not this year alone, but for years to come. It shall be told how four American boys came to the aid of"—he paused, checked himself, then went on—"came to the aid of Motu. It shall be made into a song."

"That's all r-right," says Mark, flustered as could be. "Don't mention it. You'd be doin' the s-same for us if we was in your place."

"I hope I should," says Motu. "It makes

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me proud to think I might act as you have acted."

"Well, then, let it go at that."

"There is a danger," says Motu; "it is *my* danger, but you offer to share it. For myself I would not accept, but for—for another reason I do accept. I can tell you nothing. I cannot tell you why there is a danger. But I can tell you that there will be no dishonor to you in giving me help. I have done nothing wrong."

"Oh," says Mark, "you didn't need to say that. We knew it already."

Motu shot him a look out of his black eyes that was good to see.

"Do you calc'late the four we saw are all there are after you, or can we expect more of them to come moseying along?"

"I think the four are all. There may be one other." He said that as if the one other was a different kind of person from the four, and you can take it from me as solemn fact, he was. Different! Well, I should say so. As different as a darning-needle is to a crow-bar or a weasel to a hippopotamus. "There may be one other, but he will think, not act," says Motu. "Him we should dread."

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"One of those thinkers, is he?" says I. "Well, I guess we can match him. Huh! Wait till Mark Tidd gets to playin' checkers with your thinker, and we'll see."

"Ah," says Motu, looking at Mark again, this time like he was sort of weighing him and measuring him. "The one who will come has a cunning brain. Many plots he has made."

"If he goes makin' any plots around here he'll think he bumped into the side of a house—and a *brick* house, at that. Why, Mark Tidd—"

"That's p-p-plenty from you, Tallow," says Mark, sort of cross, but I could tell by his eyes that he was pleased just the same. He likes compliments, but the ones that tickle him most are the ones about his head. Mark Tidd would rather think up a great scheme than win the hundred-yard dash in the Olympic games—and I never could understand it. I guess it's because I'm stronger in the legs than inside the skull.

"The Man Who Will Come," says Binney, pronouncing it impressive, as if every word commenced with a capital letter. The way he said it made you sort of worry. The

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Man Who Will Come! Sounded like a threat. It was a sort of name. As a matter of fact it got to be a name, and we never called him anything else, even when we knew what his real name was.

"He'll make five," says Plunk. "That's one apiece. We ain't outnumbered, anyhow."

"They're men and we're boys," says Binney.

Mark was looking at Motu and thinking hard. I could tell that because he was pinching his ear.

"Motu," says he, "I want to a-a-ask you just one question. It will make a d-difference how we act."

"Ask," says Motu.

"Will those men h-hurt you? I mean will they—injure you?"

"No," says Motu. "They will seize me and hold me. I must not be seized and held. I must be free."

"All right," says Mark.

I heard Binney muttering to himself and listened. He was saying over and over again, "The Man Who Will Come. . . . The Man Who Will Come. . . ."

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"Say," says I, "quit it. You give me the shivers."

"If you 'ain't got enough shivers," says he, "I've got a stock I can turn over to you without missin' 'em."

"Motu," says Mark, "do you calc'late they know w-w-where you are? Do you think they know you're *here*?"

"I do not believe they have found me yet. They have traced me to this lake, but they do not know I am still here. It was The Man Who Will Come who traced me. They will find me."

"But it gives us a little time to p-plan," says Mark. "If we can keep you hid for a couple of d-d-days it'll make a heap of difference."

"What good 'll a couple of days do? I wish they'd get at it and have it over with," says Plunk.

"There's goin' to be a siege," says Mark, "and we got to see that our castle's p-provisioned, and the moat full of water and the arms and armor in shape. They'll come with batterin'-rams and catapaults to knock breaches in our walls, and we've got to heat p-pitch to pour down on their heads. Hain't

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you ever read about any battles and sieges of castles like Froissart tells about in his chronicles?" He was off imagining again, and I knew there wasn't any use trying to get sense out of him while he was that way. Might as well try to play checkers with a bullfrog.

"Motu's a foreign prince," says he, "that's sought our p-p-protection. His enemies is comin' for him. They've got to tear our castle down about our ears to g-get him."

"All right," says I, "but when those real Japanese without anything imaginary about them get here I hope you'll have somethin' to stop 'em besides castles that you read about in some book. If it comes to a rumpus I'd rather have a pile of stones to throw than all the imagination in the public library."

Mark sort of squinted at me. "Hold your horses, Tallow. Before we're out of the woods you may be m-m-mighty glad I've read books, and gladder that I've got an imagination."

"Maybe so," says I, pretty dubious, but before we *were* out of the woods I got so I agreed with every word Mark said. Without his reading hitched on to his imagination I guess those Japs would have had Motu and

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would have eaten him in a sandwich, for all we could have done to prevent it. I've come to see that imagination's all right when you can compress it and shoot it into a cylinder with a piston in it like you do steam. Mark Tidd was a cylinder built to run on imagination.

CHAPTER IX

"THE first thing to remember just n-now," says Mark, "is to act like we didn't have any worry. They don't know Motu's here. So we've got to act natural and do just like we would do if he wasn't here at all."

"As how?" says I.

"Plunk and Binney b-better go fishin' as soon as supper's over. Motu 'll be just keepin' out of sight. You and I'll project around here to see what we can scheme out."

So we got supper and ate it inside where Motu wouldn't be seen. Afterward he went up-stairs, I expect to his hiding-place, and Mark and I went out on the big front porch. We sat there and talked for a while. All at once a big rabbit shot out of the bushes with its ears back like it was planning on making considerable speed. He was coming blind, but I got up to take a shy at him and he saw me. Well, sir, he was one flabbergasted rabbit. He stopped and then jumped sideways

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and then jumped the other way. For a minute he tried to run four ways at once, which is a hard thing to do. Then he made up his mind and scooted off along the shore till he got to a clump of little trees and disappeared.

"Uh!" says Mark.

"What you gruntin' for?"

"F-funny-actin' rabbit," says he. "What d'you calc'late made him come rushin' out like that?"

"Somethin' scared him," says I.

"Yes," says he, "and I'll bet I know what it was. We're bein' watched, Tallow. That rabbit marked the comin' of the f-f-first Jap."

"Well?" says I.

"Lucky there's rabbits," says he. "When you're sure you're b-bein' watched you can see to it the watcher don't see anythin' to be of profit to him." He sat pinching his cheek for a couple of minutes. Then he says: "Tallow, get up and s-s-stretch. Then stroll into the hotel slow and sneak up to the t-top. Don't pass any windows. Get as high as you can over on this side and then take a look down on those bushes there. From above you may be able to see somethin'."

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I did what he said, and climbed up as near the roof of the hotel as I could get. Then I crawled over to a window that was facing the way the rabbit came from and looked down. I couldn't see anything but trees and bushes and water, and the brown of the road winding away till it turned a bend and went out of sight.

But, I've noticed, one look doesn't always show you all there is to see. Lots of times you need to look twice, and sometimes three looks don't do any harm. I kept on squinting away—to see something move. When you look down like that, on a mass of leaves, you can't pick out objects. But just let something move and you have it spotted. So I watched for a motion. It was fifteen minutes before I saw anything, and then I saw the top of a bush crowd over and spring back. After that I knew where to keep my eyes, and you can believe I kept them there good and sharp. Pretty soon I saw more movement, and in a minute I watched something dark crawl across a little open patch. It was a man, all right.

I'd seen all I'd been sent to see, so I went on down to Mark and told him.

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"They'd just send one m-man to spy around," says he.

"I hope he gets an eyeful," says I.

"Don't tell Plunk or Binney," says he. "They might do somethin' suspicious."

"Here they come," says I, and there they did come with a dozen nice perch for breakfast. I pretended to stick up my nose and says:

"I don't see any bass. Not a bass. Huh! Well, it makes a heap of difference who goes fishin'. Some day Mark and I'll take you along and show you how it's done. It's easy."

Plunk was mad in a minute. "There ain't a better fish in the world than a perch," says he. "I'd rather eat one perch than a ton of bass."

"Maybe," says I, "but would you rather *catch* 'em?" I had him there, all right, and he didn't have another word to say.

"I s'pose you're goin' to set a watch to-night," says Binney.

"Yes," says Mark, "and we'll watch in c-c-couples. Tallow and I will sit up till midnight, and you can come on till mornin'."

"All right," says Plunk. "I'm ready to turn in now. Come on, Binney."

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We all went into the hotel and Binney and Plunk went to bed. Mark and I sneaked up to the top story, where there was a sort of balcony we could get out on and see as well as it was possible to see in the dark. There wasn't much chance for anybody to see us.

Up there we sat and sat, and it got cold. Whee! but it got cold. I had enough of it.

"I'm willin' to watch," I whispered, "but I want to watch warm. Beginnin' *now*," says I, "I watch inside. You can stay here and freeze if you want to."

"Maybe it 'll b-b-be a good idea to patrol the hotel," says Mark.

So we set out stumbling through the long corridors, stopping every minute or so to peer out of a window. We went through the third floor and the second floor and most of the first floor. Then we sat down for a while in the office. It was as dark as pitch and scary enough to suit anybody. We hadn't sat there long till Mark touched my arm and said in my ear, so low I could hardly hear him:

"L-look!"

I looked. There was a round blot against the window. It moved, and I could see it

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was a man's head and he was spying in. I knew he couldn't see us in the dark, but for all that it wasn't the most comfortable feeling in the world. Pretty soon the head went out of sight, but it showed up again in another window. Then it disappeared and we could hear stealthy footsteps on the big porch.

The next thing was a rattle at the door-knob. Then, slow, slow, slow, a crack at a time, the door began to open. I was shaking all over and my heart was thumping so it felt like it would shake the building. I reached out and felt of Mark to make sure he was there. If I had felt for him and found he wasn't there I believe I'd have screeched like an owl and tried to climb the walls. But he was there, all right. His hand that I touched wasn't very steady, either. I guess Mark Tidd was as scared as I was.

Now the door was open a foot, and the line of light disappeared to the height of a short man. In a minute the light, such as it was, was there again, and we knew the visitor was inside. Inside! Right in the room with us, and though it was a pretty good-sized room, it wasn't half big enough to

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suit me. I'd have been willing to have it a mile square.

As I said, it was as dark as a pocket, and there wasn't a chance of the man seeing us unless he stumbled over us. Mark put his hand on my knee as much as to say, "Keep quiet," but I didn't need anybody to tell me to keep quiet. I never felt more like being still in my life. I quit breathing and I guess it was five minutes before I started up again. I didn't believe a fellow could go five minutes without breathing, but I do now. I think I could go *ten* minutes if I was pushed.

We could hear the man *feeling* along the wall. It was just a soft rub with a little rustle. He was trying to find the door, I expect. He passed along the wall farthest away from us, and I was much obliged to him. He was plenty near for all the pleasure I could get out of his company. He found the door all right, because I heard him stumble on the step of the stairs. For quite a while everything was as silent as an undertaker's shop at midnight. The man was waiting to make sure nobody had heard him. Then we could hear him start to creep up the stairs.

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We let him go. Somehow it didn't seem worth while to stop him. Maybe if I'd had a Gatling gun and a Fiji war-club and a Russian bomb and a suit of armor and a battle-ax I might have asked him where he was going. But I didn't, so I couldn't see a particle of use in interrupting him. Anyhow, he might not have liked it to be interrupted and he was a sort of guest. It isn't polite to bother your guests.

We sat still about an hour, it seemed. Then Mark whispered:

"Let him g-go."

"You don't notice me stoppin' him any, do you?"

"We could scare him out," says he, "but it's best to l-l-let him prowl. He won't hurt anybody or anythin', and he won't find Motu. Maybe he'll go away, thinkin' Motu isn't here at all."

"I hate to let him get away without anythin' happenin' to him," says I. "I don't like to get as scared as I was and pay nobody back for it."

Mark chuckled the faintest kind of a chuckle. "It might do him good if we f-f-f-fixed up somethin' to amuse him," says

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he. "Somethin' he wouldn't suspect us of. Lemme think."

"Go ahead," says I. "Thinkin' can be done at all hours here."

"Where'd Plunk and Binney leave their bait-cans?" says he.

"Just outside the door."

"Sneak over and get 'em," says he.

I wasn't very anxious to, but I wasn't anxious to let Mark see I wasn't anxious, so I crawled over and reached through the door. The cans were there and I fetched them along. Mark dumped the worms and dirt out of them. They were big tomato-cans about five inches high and both of them had their tops bent back where they had been opened with a can-opener.

"Got some string?" says Mark.

I gave him a fish-line that I had in my pocket. He cut it and fastened the cans together with a piece about four feet long. Then he went toward the stairs as still as a fish swimming in a lake. He had taken off his shoes. In two jerks of a lamb's tail he was back.

"What did you do?" says I.

"Sit still and wait," says he.

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"Let's hide behind the counter, then," says I.

We did. For half an hour we scrooched down behind that counter, waiting. Then all of a sudden there was a little jangle at the head of the stairs, and right on top of it there was a big jangle followed by a yell, and somebody came bumpety-bump down head over heels, with those tin cans whanging and banging after him. I knew right off what Mark had done. He had put one can on each side of the stairs at the top, with the string stretching across between them. As soon as Mr. Jap came along his feet hit the string and jerked the cans together behind him with a bang. Then he'd tripped and come down head over apple-cart.

He hit the bottom with a whang, pretty scared by that time, I calculate. In a jiffy he was on his feet and streaking it for the door. Just as he got opposite us Mark Tidd let out the worst screech I ever heard. It sounded like a combination of a wildcat and a fire-whistle. Spooky? It was the blood-curdlingest yell I ever heard.

The Jap let out one squawk and dived at the door head first. Then he ran.

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I just laid back and laughed, not out loud, you understand, but silent, like Natty Bumpo in the Leatherstocking Tales. I was even with that Jap for the scare he gave me, all right—even and a little over. I'll bet he thought the hotel was haunted by the worst kind of a ghost, and I'll bet he didn't stop running till somebody stopped him.

"G-guess we can go to bed now," says Mark. "Don't believe anybody 'll come foolin' around again till mornin'."

I didn't think so, either, so we went upstairs, chuckling like all-git-out. When we got there Plunk and Binney were sitting up shaking in bed so they almost threw the bedclothes on the floor.

"What—what was that?" Binney says.

"That," says I, "was the official ghost of Lake Ravona. Wasn't he a peach?"

"Huh!" says Plunk. "Next time you want to have any ghosts yellin' around, just let a feller know. I'll bet you scared ten pounds off of me, and I ain't so fat I could lose it like some folks I know."

"No," says Mark, who was pretty sensitive about his fat and didn't like to have folks mentioning it—"no, you ain't fat below the

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neck, but from there up there ain't so m-m-much to say for you."

"Is it our turn to watch?" says Binney.

"There won't be any more watchin' to-night," says Mark. "The ghost 'll see to t-that."

CHAPTER X

THE next day passed without a sight of a single Japanese. Motu told us it was probably because the four were pretty badly scared by what happened the night before, and were waiting for The Man Who Will Come. He said the four were just sort of scrub Japs, full of superstitions and that sort of thing. But, says he, don't expect any ghost dodges to frighten the other fellow. Motu's idea was that the four would lay back and keep watch.

Motu stayed inside all day. Plunk and Binney fished. Mark pottered around on the island across his little lift-bridge, and I don't know just what he was up to, though I found out later, and so did the Japanese. As for me, I was just plum lazy. I took one of the books Mark brought along—it was by a fellow named Stevenson, and was all about a man named Alan Breck and another called Davie Balfour—and read. I didn't intend

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to read long, but I found out I'd got hold of the wrong kind of a book to quit. I couldn't quit, and put in the whole day at it.

At night we set watch again, but nothing happened. It wasn't till nearly noon next day when something did happen. I was sitting on the porch at the time with Mark Tidd. Down the road a couple of hundred yards we saw a man coming. He was a little man, and even at that distance we saw he walked sort of jaunty, swinging his shoulders and switching off leaves with a slender cane. He looked all dressed up.

When he got closer we saw he *was* all dressed up. Dressed up? Wow! I should say he was. He was a regular dude. Sticking in one eye was one of those funny spectacle things like Englishmen wear in funny pictures. There was just one glass to it, and it was hitched to a black ribbon. On his head was a straw hat, one of those kind that cost a lot of money and come from some place across the Pacific Ocean—a Bangkok, they call them, I guess. His clothes were light gray and they fitted him like they had been made on purpose. On his feet he wore spats—at least that's what Mark Tidd said they were.

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I never saw any such idiotic things before. You've seen a dicky for a shirt, haven't you? A sort of false front? Well, spats are dickies for shoes.

The man came on without showing a sign that he saw us. His face was screwed kind of sideways to hold that single glass in his eye, and he appeared to be pretty well pleased with himself. He was a Jap!

"Mark," says I, "it's *him!*"

"Yes," says he, "The One Who Will Come has g-g-got here."

We waited without making a move till he got right up to us. Then he took off his hat and made a bow like d'Artagnan in the *Three Musketeers*—a regular old ground-sweeper.

"To you good morning," says he, kind of mincing his words like a girl with half a college education that took lessons on the violin and elocution.

"Good morning," we says right back at him.

"You have some beautiful places to live at," says he, as polite as a hungry cat miawing around the dinner-table.

"There's f-f-folks might disagree with you," says Mark, "but we feel pretty well suited."

"To be of course," says he. "A hotel, do

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you not? Yes. For in which is meals and beds to sleep?"

"Almost," says Mark, "but not quite. It's what's left of a hotel."

"It is your hotel? You in personally are its keeper?"

"I guess it needs a keeper, all right," says Mark, "but I ain't it."

"You take in individuals for boarding?"

"Nope."

"Not? Oh, I was presenting myself as boarder. I wished rooming and eating."

"You came to the wrong shop."

"For reasonable money paid on Mondays would you not give me roomings and boardings?"

"Not even for money p-p-paid on Sundays," says Mark.

"Do you make no exceptions to rule?"

"No."

"But certainly yes. You have taking in a boarder the day or two before."

"L-l-listen here, mister," says Mark, "we're not takin' boarders now nor yesterday. We are four boys on a fishin' trip. Mr. Ames lent us this hotel. We ain't l-lookin' for any company. There you have the facts."

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"But you give board to Japanese boy. Eh? Not? To be sure. To bad leetle Japanese boy that runned off away. You meet him in woods and he say, 'Give me eatings and sleepings.' So you give to him. Also he stays yet continuously near by in room of seclusion out of view."

"Say that all over," says Mark. "I guess I d-don't quite get all of it the first bite."

"Japanese boy come. Telling story about naughty lying. Smaller Japanese boy than you are little. You see him? To be surely certain. He is running off away from fathers and mothers and uncles and relatives. See me. Looking at me closely. Have I not the look of an uncle? You see it. An uncle. Small Japanese boy has father who sends me to bringing him to return. That is all. Spankings shall be for Japanese boy, but not nothing more. Eh? He is now up over the stairs? Yes. Shall I climbing up-stairs for after him?"

"Mister," says Mark, "what are you t-talkin' about? You scramble your talk all up so nobody can understand what you're gettin' at."

"Is little Japanese boy here?"

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Mark got up and looked all around, and then looked at The Man Who Will Come, sort of puzzled.

"Did you f-f-fetch a little boy with you?"

"Not," says the man. "Before I came he arrived."

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "I guess we better humor him," he says to me, but loud enough so the man could hear. "He's one of them lunies, I calc'late. Talks c-c-crazy, don't he? What's he mean, anyhow?"

"Honorable fat boy is mistakenly in error," says the Japanese. "There is no craziness. Altogether vice versa on the opposite. I am very much unusually bright in mind. I shall show you I have an education. I know to speak many languages."

"Speak all of 'em as well as you s-s-speak English?"

"Yes, yes. Some as good and all better."

"The feller that taught you," says I, "must have known a joke when he saw it. Did he laugh much?"

He didn't pay any attention to me, but says to Mark: "What room is Japanese boy? Up-stairs?"

"He's got Japanese boy on the b-brain,"

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says Mark to me. Then he turned to the man and says: "Say, mister, was you foolin' around here the other night? S-somebody got into the hotel and fell d-down-stairs, and screeched around and raised an awful row. Was it you?"

"Ho! No, it was not myself." He laughed and showed two rows of the whitest teeth you ever saw. "It was ignorant fellow without schooling, who believe ghosts and spirits walks up and down. He was so frightened he has not yet stopped the shivering and shaking. You play trick on him? Eh?"

"Now look here," says Mark, "what do you want, anyhow? We b-boys are here for a good time, and we d-don't want anybody prowlin' around at all times of the night. If you want somethin' just say so. If we can g-give it to you we'll give; it if not, we'll tell you so."

"You give up Japanese boy?"

"I'll g-give you all the Japanese boys you can find. What d'you think we're doin'? Runnin' a congress of nations? I don't want any Japanese boys."

"You haven't seen Japanese boy?"

"I wish you'd get Japanese boy out of your

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head. I'm s-s-sick of hearin' about him. If you've got an idee we're hidin' your boy somewheres, go ahead and look. It 'll satisfy your m-mind, such as it is, and you won't be b-botherin' us any more."

"You make me permission with immediate quickness to stroll pleasantly through hotel in search?"

"Go ahead. Search till you wear out your s-s-shoes."

The man's eyes glittered at that, and he looked as eager as a hungry dog gazing at a bone through a store window.

"I can make exhausting search now?"

"The sooner the better," says Mark, and he leaned back and shut his eyes like he was sleepy.

The man went past us, stepping like a dancing-master and swinging his little cane. There was perfume on him, because I smelled it as he went past. He didn't look back as he went through the door. We didn't turn our heads to look after him for quite a few minutes, but then I went to the door and peeked in. He had gone up-stairs.

"He might find Motu," says I.

"Not m-much chance," says Mark, "and

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we may fool him into thinkin' Motu isn't here."

"Don't believe it," says I. "For all his funny talk and dude clothes, I'll bet he's a sharp little customer. If he's got it into his head Motu's here, he'll stick around till he's *certain* one way or the other."

"Maybe so," says Mark. "All we can do is try."

We sat there feeling pretty anxious, and it seemed like most of the morning and part of the afternoon had passed before we heard anything of The Man Who Will Come again. Then we didn't hear from him exactly. It was from Motu's dog we heard.

The dog was asleep in the old dining-room, a big place about fifty feet square. It was bare of furniture. All of a sudden we heard the dog give a growl that grew up into a roar. Then there was a sort of scurry and scramble, and we dashed in to see what was up.

In the middle of the room stood The Man Who Will Come, with the same happy grin on his face that he'd worn when he met us outside. In front of him the dog was crouching for another spring and growling as savage as a pack of wolves. Just as we got there the

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dog sprang. Well, sir, I thought it was all day with Mr. Jap, for the dog was as big as he was. But what followed was as pretty a sight as I ever hope to see. The man waited till the dog was in the air with his fangs almost at his throat. Then, quicker than the space between two things, and graceful as a weasel, he just took one step and bent his body to the side. The dog whirled right on by, but as he passed the man whacked him a good one right across the muzzle with his little cane.

"Ho, big dog!" he says. "You are not so polite brought up in first-rate society. I will teach you to learn. Ho!"

The dog roared and jumped again, and once more the man dodged just enough to let him pass, and slapped him over the nose with his little stick. He laughed while he did it, and acted as careless as if he was just playing a game instead of trying to save his life from a savage dog.

Twice more the dog threw himself through the air and twice more the Japanese moved just enough to let him slide by while he whacked him on the nose. Graceful! Well, I never saw anything like it. And cool!

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He was that cool you could almost feel a chilly breeze blowing off him.

That dog was mad. He didn't seem to understand just how it happened he wasn't chewing the man, and the more he thought about it the madder he got. But he saw that just going it blind and leaping for the man's throat wasn't going to do him any good. He crouched for a minute and then began to creep ahead, slow, slow. The Jap stood grinning down at him and talking all the time.

"Naughty big dog. What for do you bite to eat me? Must I box-fight you on the nose? Ho! You jump so slow. You must jump with more fastness if you catch me. Make jumping now. Come!"

But the dog didn't jump. He crawled nearer and nearer, but the man didn't move. Of a sudden, before I had any idea what he was going to do, the dog rushed, but this time he didn't jump. He came close to the floor and straight for the Jap's legs. I was looking right at that man, but he moved so fast I couldn't follow him. The next thing I knew the dog was rolling over and yowling, for the Jap had suddenly shifted somehow and kicked the dog right under the chin with

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a kick like a flash of lightning. He had a chance to run out and slam the door then, but he didn't move—just stood there and grinned at Mr. Dog.

Well, sir, that dog went crazy. He yelled and made another spring. This time the man bent backward and cut the dog just behind the ears with the edge of his hand. It was the same blow some folks use to kill rabbits. It stopped that jump right in the middle, and the dog slumped down to the floor limp and kind of dazed, for he laid there a few seconds, growling low in his throat, and acting like he wasn't quite sure whether he was a dog or a sack of potatoes.

But he had courage, that dog. He didn't quit. He struggled up to his feet and started in again. This time Mr. Jap stood with his back to the bay-window, and when the dog jumped he went down on one knee, letting the dog go right over his head. But he didn't wait for him to go way over. He rose right up in the middle of that dog and heaved with his arms and his back, and the dog just turned a cart-wheel in the air and went *smash!* through glass and window-sash and everything. Out he went, bag and baggage.

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And he didn't try to come back. He was satisfied.

The Jap looked out of the window to see the dog pick himself up and limp away; then he turned to us with the grin still on his face and says:

"The dog he learn how to know better, I feel unreasonable certain."

"Yes," says Mark, "I calc'late he's added to h-his education some."

"I have gone through your hotel from the beginning of it to the opposite endings, but there is not anywhere therein a Japanese boy. I am surprised with astonishment. He came by toward this way in a similar direction. Maybe he makes a hiding in the woods. But I am much obliged with thankfulness to you, to be sure. Now good day and pleasant fishings to you. Yours very truly."

With that he turned and minced out of the hotel. He wasn't excited. He wasn't mussed. He was just as much of a dude, and just as spotless and spick and span, as when he came in, for all that he'd had a battle with a dog that would have made most men twice his size get out of breath and maybe worse.

I looked at Mark and Mark looked at me.

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"He's quite considerable of a man, more or less," says I.

"P-plenty," says Mark.

"I expect we've got our job all cut out for us."

"That g-g-grinnin' little man gives me the shivers," says Mark. And that's just how I felt. I was afraid of him, and I don't care who knows it. Good and afraid.

CHAPTER XI

“WHAT have you been doin’ over in the citadel?” says I. The citadel was what we called the building across the bridge.

“Fixin’ engines of d-d-defense,” says Mark.

“Hope we don’t have to use ’em.”

“We will,” says he, short-like.

“You don’t think we fooled The Man Who Will Come?”

“We f-fooled him about a quart, or maybe a pint, but it ’ll wear off. He ain’t the kind to stay f-fooled.”

“No,” says Motu, from the door behind us, “he will not stay fooled, but he will fool others so they stay fooled.”

“I’ve got a lot of respect for him since I’ve seen him in action,” says I.

“If he discovers me I shall run,” says Motu. “It will be decided by legs. Who has the best legs wins.”

“The only way you could r-r-run and get away would be straight up,” says Mark, “and

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we're just out of flyin'-machines. No, you won't run, Motu. You'll stay and we'll s-s-stand a siege."

"But, Mark Tidd, this large hotel cannot be defended by five. It would take fifty fighting-men."

"It isn't the hotel we're goin' to d-defend; it's the citadel. We're keepin' it for a s-s'prise. Wait till these fellows discover you. They'll think all they have to do is to come and get you out of here—but we won't be here. Five of us can put up a pretty good fight in the citadel."

"I'm goin' for a walk," says I. "I need exercise."

"Guess I'll stay and t-t-talk to Motu," says Mark.

I went off alone, though I was a little nervous about it. I headed toward the road and went along about a quarter of a mile when all of a sudden a Japanese stepped out of the bushes into the road and stood in front of me. He just stood and looked at me and scowled.

I didn't walk past him. I expect I could have if I'd wanted to, but I didn't want to. I stopped and looked at him and scowled, but

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his scowl was working better than mine; at any rate, I didn't notice his knees shaking any. He lifted his arm and pointed back toward the hotel. Not a word did he say, but I gathered what he meant, all right. He was explaining to me politely that he didn't want me to go any farther. I was obliging about it and turned right around and made for home.

"Mark," says I when I got there, "we're prisoners."

"How?" says he.

"I tried to go for a walk, but a Japanese stopped me."

"Huh! Don't want any m-m-messages sent," says he. "I calc'late we fooled 'em a lot, a whole, whoppin' lot. . . . How'd you like to see how far they'll let you walk the other way?"

"Well," says I, "this one didn't bite me, so I guess the next one won't." And at that I started out and went in the opposite direction. This time I hadn't gone a hundred yards before a Japanese got up out of the bushes and herded me back the same as the first one did. We were besieged, all right.

I told Mark about it and he shook his head like he'd known it all the time.

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"It don't prove anythin'," says he, "except that they *think* Motu's here, and dassen't take chances. They don't *know* yet."

"When we get a chance," says I, "we'd better carry the rest of the grub across the bridge."

"No," says he; "they'd see us and suspect somethin'. We'll have to s-s-sneak over what we can; but there's enough for a couple of weeks there now."

"How about cookin'-things?" says I.

"They're not there. But we can take 'em in a second. Always have them piled together ready to grab. That 'll be your job, Tallow. Remember. At the first alarm drop everything and forget everything else. Just g-g-grab those dishes and scoot."

"All right," says I. "Here goes to get 'em ready now."

And now came the discovery of Motu by The Man Who Will Come. It was by nobody's fault unless it was Motu's own, but if what he did was a fault, then I should like to be committing faults like it all my life. We had all gotten to like Motu, for he was so pleasant and gentlemanly and patient, but that was all. We didn't feel toward

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him like we felt toward one another, and it wasn't to be expected. But from that time on he belonged. It was the first time a boy had ever been let into our crowd of four, and the last time—but this boy deserved it. The thing Motu did was not only brave, for it isn't such a big thing to be brave, but it was self-sacrificing, which is a big thing. He not only did a brave thing in an emergency when quick thinking and quick acting had to be done, but, with his eyes open, he risked capture by the Japanese, with all the important results that would have come from it. Without a moment's hesitation he risked everything for one of us, and I hope that all the rest of our lives we will be just as quick to risk everything for him. This was the way of it:

Plunk and Binney came in from fishing. They had been out in the canoe, and luck had been right in the boat with them, for they had a dandy string of bass and pickerel. Plunk got out with the fish and carried them over to the live-box. For some reason or another Binney pushed off again all alone and paddled out about twenty feet from shore. I guess at the start he had it in mind to go somewhere,

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but changed his plan. He stopped where the water was about four feet deep, and then, like a little idiot, leaned over the side of the canoe to wash his face.

He washed it, all right, and the rest of him with it. Just as if it had been alive and wanted to get rid of Binney, that canoe tipped over. *Ker-flop!* it went. Binney just had time to let out a yell. I came to the kitchen door, where I had been putting the cooking-dishes in shape, and saw him take the dive. Other folks heard the yell, for out of the tail of my eye I saw The Man Who Will Come step into sight about two hundred yards down the road and stand looking.

I expected Binney to come right up and wade ashore, but he didn't. I couldn't understand it, and my mind didn't work fast enough to figure what had happened. Mark was across the bridge in the citadel, so he wasn't there to help any, and if it hadn't been for Motu I guess our crowd of four would have been cut down to three and a pretty sorrowful three. But Motu was there, and the day will never come when I stop being thankful for it.

While I stood there like a big booby Motu

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came rushing out of the hotel and plunged into the water. He couldn't swim, either, but fortunately the water wasn't over his head between him and Binney. He surged and jumped and plowed his way to where the canoe floated, bottom up—floated and bobbed and wiggled as Binney struggled under it where he had got caught somehow.

When Motu got there he just ducked under. It pulled a yell right out of me, I was so frightened. It seemed like he was underwater half an hour, but it couldn't have been more than a few seconds. When he came up he was dragging something with him, and that something was Binney Jenks—limp and unconscious. Then Motu began plowing his way back again.

Of a sudden I remembered The Man Who Will Come and looked that way. He was coming on the run with two Japanese at his heels. They had covered half the distance.

"Quick, Motu, quick!" I bawled, and dashed into the kitchen for my dishes. By the time I was out Motu was almost to shore and the Japs were not fifty yards away.

"Mark!" I yelled. "Mark Tidd!" and scooted across the bridge.

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I might have known Mark wouldn't be far away from his job. Before I was half-way across Mark leaned over the balcony above and threw down the end of a rope with a hook on it.

"H-h-hitch it to the other end of the b-bridge," he stuttered, as excited as a chicken when there's a hen-hawk around.

I got the idea, grabbed the rope, and hooked it to the staple on the far end of the lift-bridge. Then I jumped back for the citadel side.

Now Motu was coming, staggering and running, with Binney over his shoulder. Behind him, not twenty-five yards away, were the three Japs. Motu's lips were drawn back so you could see his beautiful white teeth, and the expression on his face was the sort a man wears when he is making the greatest effort of his life.

"Hurry, Motu, hurry!" I yelled, and danced up and down with eagerness and fear and excitement.

Motu hadn't far to go, but Binney was bigger than he was, and it was too much for him to carry. My, but he was strong! He staggered on, tripping, almost falling on his

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face sometimes, and the Japs got closer and closer.

I grabbed up a couple of potatoes that had somehow spilled when we carried them over, and heaved one at the first Jap. I hit him, too, so that he grunted and stopped a little. Maybe it was enough to help. Then I threw the other at The Man Who Will Come, but he just moved his head, and I could see him grin, for all he was running so hard.

Now Motu was at the very edge of the bridge, with the Japs not a dozen feet behind.

From the balcony I heard Mark yell, "T-throw Binney on the b-bridge and jump."

Quick as a wink Motu did as he was told, and then Mark Tidd's drawbridge showed what it was made for. The instant the two boys were on the bridge Mark pushed over the iron weight that was to help lift it. But this was no time for slow lifting, so what did Mark do but grab that rope just above the weight and jump right off the balcony. Down he came, *ker-slam!* and up went the bridge with Motu and Binney on it. Up it went, with the first Japanese so close it almost caught him under the nose. He couldn't stop, and went right under the lift into the water.

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Motu and Binney came rolling and bumping down the bridge to our side. The Japs stopped sudden, and one of them hauled out the man who had fallen in.

"They—can't—swim," panted Motu.

So, for a while at least, we were safe. There wasn't a boat on that side, they couldn't come anywhere near jumping across, and they couldn't do anything till they had figured out some scheme to cross the water.

By this time Mark Tidd was down-stairs, working over Binney. He knew all about first aid, and, by pumping and working Binney's arms and one thing and another, it wasn't long before Binney showed signs that he was alive. In half an hour he was able to sit up and move around sort of feeble. It was the first second we had had time to breathe.

Mark Tidd stood up and walked over to Motu with his hand out.

"Motu," says he, "there ain't any t-thanks that will do for a thing like you did. It's somethin' that can't ever be paid for by words, or even by doin' things. But I want to t-t-tell you, Motu, that—that none of those Samurai in your country have got you beat. You're as good as the best of 'em, and

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some b-better. And one thing you can depend on, and that is that this crowd 'll stick to you, and work for you, and f-f-fight for you till they p-p-petrify."

Motu smiled a proud, grateful sort of smile and took Mark's hand. "What you say is good. It makes me fill with pride. I am joyful your Binney is safe, and I am joyful it was Motu who helped."

"Now," says Mark, "we'd better be gettin' ready for business."

I thought so, too. The Japs had disappeared behind the hotel. We couldn't see what they were up to, but we knew mighty well it was something that wouldn't be good for us.

The siege had begun.

CHAPTER XII

THERE didn't seem to be much of **any-**thing for us to do but wait till the besiegers made the first move. It wasn't as though we had a strong garrison and could make sorties. The best we could hope for was to beat off attacks. The odds weren't so bad; five boys and a dog against five Japanese men, but the odds were on their side, I expect.

Of course they had to come to us, and they had to cross water to do it. There were three ways of coming—by swimming, which Motu said they couldn't do; by boat, and they hadn't any boat; or by raft, which would be easy for them to make. They might make a bridge, I suppose, and throw it across, but it didn't seem likely. The thing we had to look out for, then, was a raft.

Both of us had good generals. I've seen enough of Mark Tidd in pinches to know that you can depend on his brain to do the best thing there is to do, and from what Motu said,

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and from what we had seen, The Man Who Will Come wasn't to be sneezed at. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have had much worry. But he was a bad one!

While I was thinking about him what should he do but walk around the corner of the hotel and call over to us from his side of the moat.

"Good day to everybody," says he.

"Same to you," says Mark. "Hope you're f-f-feelin' well."

"Oh, I am feeling splendidly well, very splendidly well, indeed. You have pretty little bridges that go up in air with sudden surprisingness," says he, and grins again.

"We like it pretty well ourselves," says Mark.

"I am talking," says The Man Who Will Come, "for purpose of argument with you to lowering down the bridge from there."

"We like it up p-p-pretty well."

"Bridges are for walking across waters with dry feet. I would desire to walk across this water shod-dry to you."

"We get a good view of you where you are. If you came nearer you m-m-might spoil the effect."

"Have you seen little bad Japanese boy

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that goes running off away from kind fathers and uncles?" says he, with another broad grin.

I guess he was being sarcastic some.

"Japanese boy!" Mark pretended to look all over except where Motu was standing. "I don't calc'late to see any Japanese boy."

"Of course certainly *not*. Why should you see Japanese boy? For not any reason. Let us imagine to suppose there is no Japanese boy. Eh?"

"I'm perfectly willin'."

"Then if there is not any why do you have bridge up in the air, for lighting on by birds?"

"We just put it up to see if it would w-w-work—and it did." Mark added that last with an aggravating kind of a grin, but the Jap grinned right back.

"I have select friends together here with me. We take pleasure if we can come across. We are anxious with desirability to come across. I have lofely dispositions, but my friends, oh, I cannot tell. Sometimes they become to get angry quickly. Do you see? If you should not let to allow them on your bridge, I cannot say, no, I am not informed, what it is they might do."

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"Huh!" says Mark. "If they're so anxious to come, tell 'em to swim."

"We have made imaginings that there is no Japanese boy. Now let us make imaginings there is one. Eh? So. That Japanese boy has told you naughty things that are lie. Oh yes. But the truth is going now to be told you. He is a bad boy, so very bad a boy. It is not good for nice boys to have him close by and near to them. In his own land there would be spanking on honorable pants for him because he is so bad. Do you see to understand?"

"Sure," says Mark. "We're p-pretty average bad ourselves. I guess your imaginary boy won't do us any harm."

The Man Who Will Come grinned again as good-natured and friendly as possible.

"You do not know me," says he. "I am of great determinations. Certainly. When in my mind I say a thing must be done, then that thing shall quickly be done without anybody bothering with a delay. Am I clearly plain? Now there is no imaginings. There is talking out straight from shoulders, as you say in this country. There stands Japanese boy. Here I stand. I am come for that boy

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Also I shall not go away and depart without him. If you American boys pull down and lower your bridge and give up the Japanese boy there shall be no harm. Not the slightness of smallest."

"That sounds good," says Mark. "We don't want any d-damage done. But s'posin', just s'posin' we couldn't get around to givin' up any Japanese boys to-day? What if we wanted a Japanese boy ourselves? What then?"

"Then," says the man, "my friends and I myself shall take the boy. We shall come across by bridge or otherwise, as the case may be. We cannot be cautiously careful to hurt anybody, can we? No. It would not be certainly possible. So we come. Then you look out. Eh?" He grinned and swung his little stick just as if he was a summer visitor chatting pleasant about the weather.

"Now you l-listen," says Mark, "and *you'll* hear some facts. There's a Japanese boy here, and his name's Motu." At that the man looked sort of surprised and turned to squint at Motu like he didn't quite understand. "Also," says Mark, "we owe that boy consid'able of a debt. We're the debt-

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payin' kind. Now, then, here's Motu. If you want him, mister, come and get him. That's f-final."

"Good," says the man. "Now we know, do not we? Each knows the other's intention that he hopes to do. That makes it better. Good day to everybody."

"Good day," says Mark, "and if I was you I'd think it over a little before I started m-m-makin' a landin' on this shore. It's a hot shore and l-likely to burn your feet."

The man turned with the politest kind of a bow, and walked away as jaunty as the tenor in the Wicksville choir.

"Quick!" says Mark. "One of you get around to the other side of the citadel to see if anythin's happenin'." You see, he'd been suspicious that the man hadn't come just to talk, but to keep us interested while he tried something where we couldn't see. And Mark was right.

Plunk and I scooted around where we could see the other side, and there, about thirty feet off, was a Jap hanging on to a short log with one arm, and paddling toward us as fast and as quietly as he could. He didn't see us.

"What 'll we do?" says Plunk.

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"Splash him a little," says I. "No need to hurt him, but make him think he's goin' to get a good swat on the head."

I picked up a good-sized stone from the beach and heaved it. It didn't land more than two feet from the Jap, and it made an awful splash. You can bet he quit paddling sudden and stuck up his head to see what was going on. At that Plunk let a rock fly. It hit the log just ahead of Mr. Jap and bounded off. Down went his head so nothing but his nose showed, and he began to back away.

Well, sir! For three or four minutes we had enough fun with that fellow to last us a week. We heaved rocks on every side of him, and some of them close enough to make it pretty uncomfortable. We could have hit him if we'd wanted to, but we didn't. In the first place, Mark Tidd wouldn't have liked it, and in the second place we wouldn't have liked it ourselves. War's war, but there's no use doing more damage than you have to do to get results. And we got them, all right. That Jap had enough swimming on a log to last him.

When he got to shore he floundered out, and the way he skinned for shelter was

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enough to get a laugh out of a man that had just hit his thumb with a hammer. We whizzed a couple more stones past him and then gave the order to stop firing.

Mark said the scheme was to sneak a man on the island who would creep around and cut the rope that held the bridge.

Well, that was the first skirmish, and we had come out on top. It made us all feel pretty good, but all the same we realized there hadn't been much to it. We knew that before very long we'd have more to do than shy rocks at a man in the water who couldn't shy back again.

All at once I remembered the canoe Binney had tipped over in. I looked, and there it was, floating bottom side up, about thirty feet from shore and in shallow water where anybody could wade out to it. I didn't wait for anybody to tell me, but just took a header off the dock, clothes and all, and swam out into the lake. I knew better than to swim right for that canoe, because that would attract attention to it. But as soon as I thought it was safe I turned and swam for it faster than I ever swam before in my life. When I was about twenty feet from it I heard

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a yell and saw a Jap racing down from the hotel to get to the canoe first. At the same time I heard another yell from the citadel, and a rock whizzed past Mr. Jap. It didn't stop him a bit, though; he came right on. So did the rocks; and I shouldn't be surprised if this time Plunk and Binney were really trying to hit.

The Jap rushed into the water, and about that time I got my toe on the bottom and splashed toward the canoe. He got to one end just as I got to the other. I jerked and he jerked, but he was strongest. For myself I wasn't afraid, for whenever I wanted to I could turn tail and swim to safety, but I didn't want those men to have that canoe, so I set my heels and tugged like a good one.

It wasn't any good. Little by little he jerked me toward the shore, and I was about ready to give up when I heard a sharp little *spat*, and the Jap let out a squeal. Right after came another *spat*, and I saw Mark Tidd taking aim with his slingshot. Now Mark was about the best shot with a sling in Michigan. He let go the pebble, and, *mister*, but it was a good shot! It plunked the Jap right on the hand. He yelped and

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let go, and in that second I snatched the canoe away from him and gave it a push toward deep water.

He recovered himself quick and jumped after it, but I had time to give it another push, and that carried it out over his head.

"Ho!" says I. "Don't you wish you'd learned to swim when you was a boy?" He made a jump for me, mad as a hornet, but I knew a trick worth two of that. I took the heel of my hand and just skipped the top of the water with it. You know how to do it. It shoots a shower into the other fellow's face and blinds him for a minute. I shot a couple into Mr. Jap's face and then swam away without hurrying over it.

In a second I caught up with the canoe and towed it to the citadel, where we pulled it up on shore.

"Tallow," says Mark, "you're p-promoted for gallantry under f-f-fire, and for presence of mind in an emergency."

That made me feel pretty good, for Mark don't praise unless praise is earned. Motu came over, too, and says:

"It was very well done. Some day you will be a leader of fighting-men."

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I guess I blushed.

Mark walked around the place a couple of times to get the lay of the land, I expect, though goodness knows he ought to have known it by heart before. At any rate, he had looked it over enough.

So you will understand, I'll tell you just how the citadel lay. Maybe it would be best to furnish you with a little map of the hotel and the island where the citadel was, for you can always tell better by a map than any other way. So you'll find a map alongside some place.

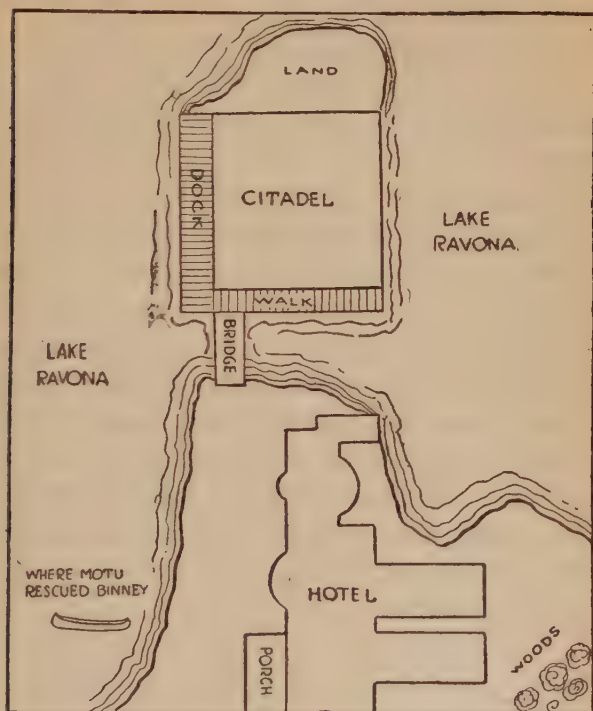
The citadel was about fifty feet square and three stories high. The back of it was built on spiles in the lake. One side was toward the hotel, the other side faced out toward a sort of strait that connected the two parts of the lake, and between the house and the water was a little patch of land with some tall hemlocks on it. In front was nothing but a dock about twenty feet broad. And there you are.

Mark came back with his plan for mounting guard in his head.

"It 'll be necessary to have t-t-two guards at once," says he, "and you'll have to p-patrol

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regular beats. One beat will be from the bridge around the front of the citadel to the end of the dock. The other will be around



the r-r-rim of the island from the dock to the back end of the house. D-durin' the day turns will be one hour long. At night they'll be t-three hours, so as to give each fellow a

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chance to sleep a little betweentimes. There's f-five of us, which will give one man a chance to sleep all night every night and get r-r-rested up."

"How'll we see at night?" says Plunk.

"F-fires," says Mark. "We'll b-build two good fires, one in front and one back by the trees."

"And what 'll the alarm be?" says Binney.

"Anythin' 'll be the alarm. Just make the n-noise you think of first. So long's it's loud enough it 'll do all right."

So far as I was concerned I guess nobody had any complaint to make about *my* alarms. If they were as loud as I was scared every time I had to make an alarm I'll bet they were heard on the Pacific coast. And I had to make them, too. Don't forget about that. There were alarms enough to satisfy anybody's appetite.

CHAPTER XIII

"I DON'T see," says I, "why we couldn't just as well pile into a boat and row to the far end of the lake. From there we could make tracks for town and save all this bother."

Mark Tidd just looked at me disgusted.

"How far is it to t-t-town?" says he.

"Ten miles," says I.

"How m-much lead d'you think you'd get on the Japs by rowin' to the end of the lake?"

"Mile or so," says I.

"Huh! Those men could run there 'most as fast as we could row. We'd gain some, but in the t-t-ten miles to town they'd catch us, and a f-fine chance we'd have."

I guess he was right about it. We were safer where we were, though I'd have liked more water between us than there was.

"Mr. Ames ought to be here in three days," says Binney. "Then Motu 'll be safe."

"Yes," says Mark, sarcastic-like. "I s'pose

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five Japs 'll be close to scared to death of one lame old man. Why, Mr. Ames hasn't as much f-f-fight in him as any one of us."

"But he might fetch somebody with him," says Plunk.

"That's what we've got to hope for," says Mark. "The main thing right now is to keep off the Japanese till Mr. Ames does come. Three days is a l-long time."

"Yes," says I, "but it would be a heap longer if we didn't have plenty of grub."

"'Tis supper-time," says Binney. "Come on."

Well, sir, five minutes after that you could have bought the whole crowd for a cent with a hole in it. We got everything ready to cook and fixed wood and kindling for the fire—and nobody had a match. We searched our pockets and turned them inside out. Then we rummaged through everything we had brought over to the citadel from the hotel; and as a last resort we scoured the whole citadel to see if somebody hadn't left one laying around by accident. But there wasn't a match.

"No coffee," says Binney.

"Coffee!" grunted Mark. "What's worry-

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in' me is no f-fires to-night. We might peg along somehow with the grub we've got, but we can't get along without fire to-night."

"Might make fire like the savages do," says I. "Take a stick with a point to it and whirl it around in a hole in another stick."

"If I was wrecked on a d-d-desert island," says Mark, "and there wasn't any other way, I might try that. Probably it 'd take a day's fussin' to get the things fixed just right so's they'd work. No, there's a b-better way than that."

"What is it?" says I.

"Go get the box of m-matches on the kitchen shelf in the hotel."

"Sure," says I. "Just call and ask The Man Who Will Come to toss 'em over."

"Get all the fun you can out of it *now*," says Mark, "because you're elected, Tallow."

"Me?" says I. "Why?"

"Because you're the best s-s-swimmer."

"Next time," says I, "I won't learn to swim."

"I don't think there'll be much danger," says Mark. "We'll fix up a decoy. How f-far can you swim under water, Tallow?"

"Fifty or sixty feet," says I.

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"Good. I've seen you do b-b-better 'n that. First we'll send out Plunk in the canoe. He'll start out from the wharf and p-paddle along the shore about two hundred f-feet out. He'll take a cloth and m-make b'lieve wave it to somebody on the far shore. I calc'late that 'll interest the Japs some. Eh? Sort of give 'em the idea reinforcements are comin'."

"Fine!" says I. "But where do I come in?"

"I'll show you that as soon as Plunk's gone."

"When does he go?"

"Now," says Mark.

"And all I've got to do is just slide across and fetch a supply of matches?" says I. "Swim under water with 'em? How 'll I keep 'em dry? And while I'm there hadn't I better fetch along the kitchen stove? Could just as well 's not."

"You're goin' to be k-kept busy," says Mark, "without tirin' yourself out tryin' to be funny. Do your jokin' when you get back with the m-matches."

We pushed off the canoe and Plunk started out with a pillow-case lying handy for him to wave. He paddled until he got opposite the

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porch of the hotel, and then, all of a sudden, he acted as if he was looking for something on the far shore of the lake. After he'd watched a minute he rose up as high as he dared without tipping over, and began to wave like he had gone crazy. He flapped that pillow-case around his head in circles and back and forth and up and down, at the same time letting out a holler as if he was tickled to death about something.

As soon as Plunk's side-show was performing I got ready for the main act. Mark took me into the citadel, where we pried up a loose plank in the floor. That part of the building was built on spiles right over the water. So all I had to do was let myself through. That way I could get into the water without the least bit of danger of anybody's seeing me. The water was up to my neck under the floor and got deeper toward the edge. I found that out all by myself. It didn't take any help at all. All I did was to take one step careless-like, and into a hole I went *ker-splash!*

It wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't been talking to Mark at that minute. But I was. I guess I must have been saying a big word, because my mouth was as far open as

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I could get it. When you duck suddenly under water with your mouth wide open the pleasure you get out of it is very small. If Lake Ravona hadn't been a pretty good-sized body of water I'd have swallowed all of it and left the fish flopping on dry land. As it was I did my best and lowered the level considerable.

When I came up, choking and splashing and close to drowned to death, Mark Tidd was laughing fit to split.

"See if you can t-t-think of anythin' humorous to say now, Tallow. You've been unusual funny these few days past."

"I'd like to have *you* down here," says I. "I'll bet I'd make you think of somethin' pretty laughable."

"Duck your head," says he, still shaking all over like a plate of jelly, "and swim under water to the back of the hotel. You can crawl in through the kitchen window and get out again without anybody knowin' you've b-b-been there."

I was mad, but there wasn't anything to do but swallow it and wait for a chance to get even. So I took a sight for the place where I wanted to land and dived.

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Swimming under water is all right when you do it for fun and when you do it in water you know all about. But here I wasn't doing it for fun—far from it—and I didn't know much about the water. I was pretty confident there weren't any spiles or boulders between me and shore to split my head against, but I didn't *know*. There's a heap of difference between being pretty sure and *knowing*. An ounce of *know* is better than a ton of *pretty sure*.

I took it as easy and cautious as I could, and after I'd been swimming ahead till I thought my lungs would burst if I didn't get a breath of air my knees scraped the bottom. I'd got as far as I could go under water. So I crouched down with nothing but my nose and eyes above water, and spied around a bit.

I didn't see a soul any place, so I crept in nearer, and got out on shore at the back of the hotel. The kitchen window wasn't far, now, so I made a break for it. When I got to it I stopped again and looked all around as well as inside. It looked safe. If only things were always as safe as they look it would be fine. Wouldn't it? But they're not.

I pulled myself up and scrambled inside.

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It wasn't very light in there, but I could see as well as I needed to—at any rate, I thought I could. Anyhow, I found my way across to the shelf and grabbed a large package of matches. Then I turned and scuttled across to the window I'd got in at. Right there was a surprise party for me—about the worst one I ever got. I raised my head above the edge of the window and looked out. While I was doing that a Japanese outside was raising his head above the level of the window to look in. We almost rubbed noses.

It was a close race to see who was most startled, but I guess I won. I figure I did because he wouldn't have been looking in that way if he hadn't expected to see something. I wasn't expecting any sights, and didn't need any. I could have got along fine without seeing any Japanese just then.

I let go and dropped back quick. It was pretty plain I couldn't get out the way I got in, and it was just as sure I was in a bad box. I'd been discovered, and stood a first-class chance of being trapped right there in the kitchen. I bolted.

My main idea was to get anywhere else, I didn't so much care where. I wanted to

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move and move quick. I did, too. Through the dining-room and into the office, where I stopped a second to breathe and see if I could think. Outside I could hear Plunk yelling and cheering like he was at a baseball game. Whether the Jap who discovered me did any yelling to give the alarm I don't know. I found I didn't do a very workman-like job of thinking, so I says to myself that if I couldn't think I'd better run, anyhow. I ran. This time I headed up-stairs because I caught a glimpse of The Man Who Will Come outside, watching Plunk, and, though I couldn't see any more, I believed other Japanese were with him. If I'd had any hopes of escaping out of the front door they went glimmering.

I scooted down the long corridor toward the other end of the hotel, partly because it was about the only way I *could* go, and partly to get nearer to the citadel. I wanted to get a chance to warn Mark Tidd of the predicament I was in if I could.

I suppose I could have gone on to the third floor and hidden in Motu's old den, but the matches kept weighing on my mind. If I holed up like a frightened fox and took the matches with me Mark and the fellows would

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be in a bad fix that night. I made up my mind I'd get the matches across somehow, no matter what happened to me. That was why I wanted to get near the citadel. If I could attract Mark's attention I could heave the matches over to him, and then have my mind free to look out for myself.

About half-way down I thought I heard a sound ahead of me, and stopped quick. Sure enough there was a sound. It was somebody coming up the back stairs, probably to head me off. That made me listen back the way I'd come. Right then and there I pretty nearly quit and curled up on the floor like one of those little green worms does when you touch it with a stick. I couldn't go either way. All the choice I had was which room I'd hide in.

As a matter of fact I didn't stop to choose, but just bobbed into the nearest doorway. By luck the key was in the door and I turned it. Then I tiptoed to the window, but it was too far to jump or drop without taking a big chance of spraining an ankle. Over at one side was a door that opened into a bathroom, and the bathroom opened into another room, and the other room opened into another room.

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A regular suite, it was. Then I got an idea. If I do say it myself, it was about as good as Mark Tidd could have done in the circumstances.

I had already locked the hall door. Quick as a wink I ran to it and banged against it like I was trying to get out, or had slipped and fallen against it. Then I scooted through the bathroom door and locked that. After that I just went headlong, but as quietly as I could go, into the third room. You see, I figured the Japanese would hear the noise, and when they found the door locked would think I was there. Then if they tried the next room and the bath they'd find *that* door locked, and, because I had the key right in my pocket, they'd be more than liable to suppose it was locked on the *inside*. That would make them dead certain I was in there. While they were trying to break in and catch me I'd be making tracks.

Now, Mark Tidd or not, I think that was a good scheme. I don't get up a scheme very often, so when I do I want folks to know about it and sort of appreciate it.

This scheme worked. I heard a man rush by the door of the room where I crouched.

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Then, as plain as day, I heard him meet another fellow in front of the locked door. They jabbered a minute in their funny language, and after a minute they rattled on the door.

"Open," says a man.

Of course nobody answered.

"Open," he says again, "or we break."

"Go ahead," I thought to myself. "That's what I want you to do."

But they didn't bu'st the door down. They went into the next room and, I expect, found the bathroom and the other locked door. I know they did, for I heard them bang on it and yell again. Both of them yelled. I knew then that the hall was clear, so I opened my door and scooted. My bare feet didn't make much noise and I got to the top of the back stairs all right, but I didn't go down. What was down there I didn't know, but I did know that nobody was straight ahead—and straight ahead took me nearer to the citadel.

There was a turn in the corridor that hid me from anybody behind, so I slacked down so as not to make a particle of sound. Into the very last room I went. It had a side window that looked right out on the little strait that separated me from the citadel.

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You can guess it didn't take me long to throw up that window and look out. The Man Who Will Come was still on the beach, watching Plunk. Across on the dock was Mark Tidd. I didn't stop to think, but just let out a yell at Mark. He turned, but didn't see me for a second. As soon as he saw me I drew back my arm and threw the matches as far toward him as I could. They landed safe. He picked them up and waved his hand.

I took a look toward The Man Who Will Come and saw that he saw me, for he was coming on the run. It was my move, all right, so I began by getting out of that room into the hall. The door opposite was open and I took a chance on going in. Outside its back window was the roof of a porch—a sort of dish-washing, fish-cleaning porch off the kitchen. It was built on spiles and stood maybe six or eight feet into the water.

Out on that porch I got, and not a minute too soon, for those two Japanese had smelled me out and came tearing in at the door. I hadn't much time to figure. I was cornered. The only way off that porch was through the window, and the Japanese were between that

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and the door—one of the nicest little traps you ever saw.

Well, there was just one thing for me to do. I knew how deep the water was below. It was a good seven feet. The drop was a little over twenty-feet—and, as Mark Tidd said, I was the best swimmer and diver in the bunch. I jumped to the edge, poised a second, and dove.

It wasn't much of a dive. I've taken higher ones, but the water was pretty shallow. Still, there really wasn't such a terrible risk to it. I turned as soon as I struck the water, and, though I touched bottom, it wasn't hard enough to hurt me. Then I struck out for the citadel. The rest was easy.

Mark Tidd was there to help me climb out, and so was Motu.

"Guess we'll have to get a m-m-medal struck off for him, won't we, Motu?" says Mark.

"He shall have a thing better than many medals," says Motu. "I am glad I saw it. I will make it into a song myself. 'The Leap of Tallow Martin' it shall be called."

"Aw, shucks!" says I, but all the same I was just a bit pleased with myself.

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Mark saw that like he sees everything, and calculated it was his duty to take me down a peg.

"There wasn't the r-r-risk you figure, Motu," says he. "He'd have landed on his h-head, you know, and that wouldn't have hurt him."

CHAPTER XIV

OUR supper was a little late that night, but it tasted all the better for that. Before we ate, Mark insisted on our building the two watch-fires, and somebody was keeping his eyes on the enemy's country every minute.

When it gets dark at Lake Ravona it doesn't just fool around with it; it gets right down to business and turns out first-quality darkness. There wasn't any moon, but there were seven million stars, which only made it seem blacker than it was. Outside the circle where our fires threw light you couldn't see any more than as if you were trying to look through a black curtain.

Motu and Plunk drew the watch for the first part of the night, and Mark and I went up to the second floor of the citadel to sleep. Before we turned in we stepped out on the roof of the porch to look around. Below we could see the fires blazing, and a dark figure

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standing by each of them. Plunk was by the one in front of the citadel, and Motu was near the other.

"It don't seem real, does it?" I says.

"Does l-l-look like a dream or somethin'," says Mark.

"I didn't mean just what we see—the fires and things—but the whole mix-up we're in. Here we are, four boys from Michigan, way up here in the mountains in a ramshackle hotel by ourselves, when we expected to be staying at a swell summer resort. That don't seem real, but when you add to it that we've got a war on our hands all on account of a mysterious Japanese boy who appears from nowhere, and add to that again that the enemy is a party of Japanese men trying to get that boy—well, it pretty nearly flabbergasts me. It ain't so, that's all."

"It is m-m-mysterious," says Mark. "I've been figgerin' it over quite a bit."

"What d'you make of it?"

"Not much. Motu's the mystery. If we knew what he's doin' here, or if we knew who he was, then we could make a guess. Yes," he says, sort of calculating-like, "it's *who* and *what* Motu is that is the real m-m-mystery."

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"You can bet," says I, "that he ain't just a common, every-day boy like you and me."

"Never heard of anybody b-b-besiegin' a citadel just to get their hands on either of us, did you?"

"Not yet," says I.

"Motu's *somebody* or *somethin'*," says Mark. "He's mighty secret about it, too. Got a right to be if he wants to. But it sure makes me m-mighty curious."

"Well," says I, "we'll know some day."

"Can't tell," says Mark. "Maybe it's one of those kind of s-s-secrets that can't ever be told."

"That," says I, "would be doggone aggravatin'."

"It would," says Mark. "Let's go to bed."

About the next thing I remember was Plunk shaking me to tell me his watch was over. It didn't seem like I'd shut my eyes at all.

"Anything happen?" says I.

"Not a thing," says he. "They've got a big fire, and a couple of them are sittin' in front of it. But they haven't made a move. Just watchin' us, I guess."

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Mark and I went down to mount guard. Sure enough, they had a big watch-fire, and a couple of them were crouching in front of it. Mark and I walked up and down and up and down, but nobody stirred. For hours it kept on just like that. Somehow I got a feeling that nothing was going to happen, and I told Mark so.

"Just the t-t-time somethin's apt to happen," says he. "The Man Who Will Come is p-probably tryin' to make us feel that way, and as soon as we act careless, *swoop!* down he'll be on us."

But I was right for once. Morning came without a hostile act by the enemy. It was just five o'clock when Mark and I turned in, and we slept till nine. We'd have slept longer if Binney hadn't set up a yell.

"Boat!" he says. "Boat! There's a boat comin' down the lake."

We hustled out to see, pretty hopeful all of a sudden. It looked like the siege was ended and reinforcements were coming. The boat was way down at the far end of the lake and we could just see it and two figures sitting in it, rowing. It was headed our way.

"I'll bet it's Mr. Ames come ahead of

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time," Binney says, beginning to dance up and down, he was so excited.

Mark didn't say anything, and he didn't look glad, only worried and puzzled.

"What's the matter?" says I. "Come on and join the celebration."

"I never s-s-shoot firecrackers till the Fourth of July," says he, which was as much as to tell us we were getting happy ahead of time.

The boat didn't come very fast, because the wind was blowing right in its face. When it came near enough so we could make out to see men in it we could tell they were pretty poor boatmen. They did more splashing than they did rowing. And then we saw they were Japanese! Somewhere around the lake they had found an old scow.

"Well," says Mark, with a long breath, "the enemy's got a n-navy."

"Yes," says I, "and we'd better strengthen our shore-defense batteries."

"I t-think," says Mark, "that The Man Who Will Come will try to take the citadel by s-storm—*once*. He's due to load his army aboard his navy and attack. If we can beat them back once he won't try it again. It 'll be stratagems we'll have to look out for."

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"Five boys and a dog," says Binney.

"More'n that," says Mark, with the sort of look he wears when he's got an unpleasant surprise waiting for somebody. "I calc'late we'll have quite a sizable army when the time comes."

"Goin' to enlist the fish?" says Plunk.

"Might if I had to," says Mark, and I'll bet he *would* have found some way to use them if he'd *had* to.

The Japanese began to stir around and pretty soon they started for the boat. Mark began giving orders.

"Motu and Plunk, you're strongest. Get those two long p-p-poles inside; I've put spikes in 'em. Regular p-pike-poles. Use 'em to fend off the boat. Jab the spikes in the boat and p-push. Keep 'em from touchin' the shore. You ought to be able to hold 'em ten feet away."

"Aye, aye, sir," says Plunk.

He turned and scooted into the citadel as fast as his size would let him, and that was faster than you would expect. In a jiffy he was back with a couple of poles an inch and a half thick and eight feet long, with a big pad like a boxing-glove on the end of each.

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He'd been making them on the quiet while the rest of us were fooling around.

"Tallow and Binney, take these lances," says he. "When a m-m-man steps off a boat he isn't balanced very well. If anybody gets to land jab this into his stomach and poke him back. Keep the lances handy for close work. Use your slingshots for artillery. As soon as the boat starts out open fire. Aim for the f-f-fingers of the men rowin'."

"What are you aimin' to do?" says I.

Mark sort of chuckled. "I'm goin' upstairs where it's safe," says he.

That was a joke, all right. Mark Tidd wasn't the sort of fellow to hunt a hole when his chums were running risks, so I knew he had some sort of a scheme whizzing in his head. It stiffened my spine in a second. When it comes to strategy I take off my hat to Mark.

We kept our eyes on the Japanese, who were getting into the old scow. They weren't used to boats and had a pretty tough time pushing off and getting under way. But when they got started they came like they meant business.

The Man Who Will Come was standing up in the stern. Two Japs were rowing, and

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two sat all ready to attack as soon as they landed. They had to row about two hundred feet.

Binney and I held our fire till they were a hundred feet off, then we let fly. We didn't hit any fingers at that distance, but we knocked some dust out of a couple of pairs of pants. We could see the Japanese jump and squirm, for those pebbles hit plenty hard and stung enough to make anybody wish he had on a suit of armor.

We kept up a steady fire, and Plunk joined in while they were too far away to reach with his pole. None of us bothered with The Man Who Will Come. It was the machinery we wanted to damage, and the two rowers were the engine. I was sort of sorry for those fellows, because they caught it and caught it good. At last Binney plunked one fellow right on the knuckles. He got half out of his seat, let out a howl, and dropped his oar overboard. That made the boat swing around sideways. The Man Who Will Come didn't lose his jaunty air for a minute. He just spoke low to the man, who reached out quick and got his oar.

They pulled around straight and came on

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again. Binney and I kept on peppering them good. I had the luck to smack my man on the hand, but he didn't drop his oar. He missed a stroke, though.

The Man Who Will Come fixed his round glass in one eye and beamed at us as jovial as could be.

"Ho, leetle boys, make a stopping. Do not throwing stones. My men will get to become angry if you hurt them some more."

"I'll hurt *you*," says I, and gave him one for luck.

It struck him on the elbow. Must have hit his funny-bone, I guess, for he didn't act quite so happy and began rubbing the spot.

"For that," says he, "I shall make a spanking on you when you are caught."

"It might as well be a *good* spanking," says I, and let him have another.

"F-f-fire volleys," says Mark Tidd from way up above.

Binney and I tried it. I'd call, "Shoot," and we'd both let go. Plunk, too. It worked fine. Mark began to shoot, too, and you know what a shot he was with the sling. Well, sir, we stopped them. The men at the oars turned and grumbled something to their

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commander. He said something back, but they shook their heads. He stopped smiling and spoke louder in Japanese. Now he wasn't smiling, but you could see his teeth just the same. His eyes were half shut and glinting, and he leaned forward like he was going to leap.

The men were more afraid of him than they were of getting hurt, for they picked up their oars once more.

"I'll t-t-take the commander," says Mark. "You three 'tend to the rowers."

Mark shot fast, and every pebble struck. I could see them spat against The Man. They were only about thirty feet away now and shooting was easy. We shot faster than ever. Spat, spat, spat, spat, went the pebbles. Mark had The Man fidgeting good and plenty, and we had the poor rowers about as uncomfortable as men can be.

At last it got to be too much for The Man himself, and when the rowers stopped again he said something, and they turned the boat and began to retreat. We helped them.

"Ain't goin' to spank me to-day, be you?" says I to The Man.

He turned and grinned and waved his little

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cane. "It is but the beginning of the commencement," says he. "Plenty of time for spankings is yet left remaining."

"I'll show you how it feels," says I, and gave him one right where he'd have spanked me. He quit standing up without a second's delay. I guess he figured he'd rather be hit some place else by a pebble. Well, I accommodated him.

"Three c-c-cheers," says Mark, and we all threw our hats in the air and yelled.

It was the first big battle of the campaign. They had tried a straight frontal attack, as Mark called it, but Mark's strategy and his disposition of his artillery had won the battle. So far we had come out ahead every place from the beginning. But the end was a long way off.

"Don't leave your places," says Mark. "They'll be back."

CHAPTER XV

THE enemy rowed back and got out of their boat. Some of them acted pretty lame, too. They hunched around and rubbed sore spots, while we gave them the laugh. All of them went up to the hotel, where, after a while, we heard them hammering and hammering.

"B-buildin' a modern navy," says Mark. "Wooden vessels went out of style when the *Monitor* steamed into Hampton Roads."

"Slingshots 'll go out of style, too, won't they?" says I.

"They won't be quite so useful, anyhow," Mark says, "but I calc'late we'd better hang onto 'em."

Motu's eyes were shining. He looked about as happy as I've ever seen anybody look.

"It was a great battle," says he. "My father has told me stories of the battles of ancient warriors of Japan. This was like

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them. When I come again to my country this day shall be spoken of with pride by my family, and in after-years my descendants shall tell their children of it."

"Wait a bit," says Mark, "and your descendants 'll have m-m-more to brag about. This day's battle ain't over yet by several shots."

"The more fighting the more glory," says Motu.

Now I didn't feel that way about it. The more fighting the more bother, was my notion. I'd had plenty. My appetite was fed up, and I didn't have any use for a second helping. But I didn't come of a race of warriors. I expect my way of looking at it is the American way. We don't fight for glory, but only when it's necessary, and then we want it over with and done as soon as possible, just as we do any other disagreeable job that may come along.

"Look," says Binney.

Around the corner of the hotel came four Japanese, carrying a sort of fence made of an old strip of carpet nailed on posts. They took it down to the boat and The Man showed them how to set it up and nail it in place so

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that the front and both sides of the craft were sheltered. With that armor a fellow couldn't see the rowers at all; in fact, the whole five of them could sit in the boat and we couldn't get a crack at them.

"Here's where we get it," says I to Mark.

"Maybe," says he, "but you f-f-fellows fend off with your pike-poles, and, Tallow and Binney, you 'tend to anybody that reaches over to meddle with the poles while they're holdin' the boat. Get the idea? So long as we can hold off the boat n-nobody can land, and we can hold off the boat as l-long as our pike-poles are left alone."

Well, sir, you'll have to admit Mark was some general. That pike-pole idea was a dandy, and, in spite of their new armor, our slingshots would be useful a heap. And then, there was Mark up on the balcony of the third floor, and he could shoot right down on top of the Japs.

"Motu," says I, "I guess those old warriors of your'n never had a better general than Mark Tidd."

He just grinned.

Now the enemy was ready to attack again. They boarded their man-of-war and pushed

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off, and a funny-looking ship they had. Of course the rowers couldn't see where they were going, and so somebody had to stand up to direct them. The Man took the job of being pilot, so we had something to shoot at from the beginning.

This time there was no chance of damaging the motive power, but we could make the pilot wish he had a periscope. It was lucky for us they didn't have a submarine.

They came on steady and sure until they got in range. Then they kept on just as steady, only we kept The Man hopping. By the time they got within a hundred feet we had him ducking his head behind the armor plate and only sticking it up to take a peek every little while. The result of that was that the boat did quite a considerable bit of zigzagging.

However, they kept coming, and at last they were near enough so Mark Tidd could get a shot at them from his station above. He shot fast and often, and I expect those Japs wished their leader had put a roof on their shelter.

But, no matter how straight and how fast he could shoot, one boy couldn't hold off the

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boat with a sling. Besides, it was difficult shooting. So, in a couple of minutes they got dangerously near to shore.

"P-p-pike-poles!" yelled Mark.

Motu and Plunk were ready. They jabbed their spikes into the bow of the boat and pushed. The boat stopped sudden and swung sideways. Plunk let go and ran along till he could spear the boat near the stern, and there they held her. The Japs tried to row, but Binney and I grabbed our lances with the boxing-glove pads on the end and poked at their paddles so they couldn't do a thing.

The Man yelled something in Japanese, and the rowers pulled in their oars. In a second one of them stood up suddenly and smashed at Plunk's pike-pole with his oar-blade. He might have hit if it hadn't been for Mark and Binney. Both of them smacked him good with pebbles and he ducked. The best part of it was that he dropped his oar. Before they could do anything to recover it Mark yelled to me to get it, which I did with my pike. It was the first trophy of the war, and something to brag about like real soldiers do when they report they've captured so

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many of the enemy's cannon, or some such thing.

The next thing they tried was a little more skilful, but it didn't work much better. A man lifted the carpet armor a little at the bottom and shoved through his arm. He tried to grab the pike and jerk it away from Motu, but Motu had jabbed in his spike good, and he pushed like a Trojan. The man didn't make much headway, and after we'd peppered his knuckles a couple of times he didn't seem anxious to keep it up. He let go, and for a couple of minutes nothing happened. I guess The Man Who Will Come was holding a council of war with himself.

After that they tried poking their oars through and punching at the pike-poles with them, and that was a better scheme than any of the rest, for there wasn't anything for our artillery to aim at. But they had to go it blind. Nobody seemed to want to stand up to see just where they were poking, so they didn't have very good luck at it. A few times they thumped off one of the pike-poles, but before it did them any good Plunk or Motu would jab it in again, and they were no further ahead than before.

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"Hey!" says Mark to The Man, "don't you know history t-t-teaches that land defenses can't be taken with a n-navy alone?"

"We take, all right," says The Man from behind his shelter. "We take and then comes punishings. Ho! we shall see."

"Better give it up," says Mark. "We'll let you go with honors of war."

"No. You have our bad leetle Japanese boy. Give him up to us and we make lovely speed away without spankings. Nobody shall have a spanking."

"Glad to h-hear that," says Mark. "We'd hate to be s-s-spanked."

"You give him up? Yes?"

"We'll give him up, no," says Mark.

At that, quick as a wink, The Man stood up in the boat with an oar in his hand. Of course all three of us shot and shot like fury, but before we could stop him he swung his oar over his head and brought it down on Plunk's pike-pole. The pike-pole snapped and Plunk dropped his end like it was hot. I guess it must have stung his hands some.

The boat was held only by Motu's pike-pole now, and its stern began to swing toward the shore. That wasn't so bad, because

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there was no armor plate around the back, and we could shoot right through. We didn't miss any time doing it, and the way they scrambled to swing their navy around was a caution.

It was only a question of time now, and we all knew it. The Man could stand up as soon as he was ready and smash Motu's pole the same way he did Plunk's, and then we fellows would have to join battle with our lances.

But it didn't come to lances just then. All of a sudden Mark Tidd yelled to look out. I looked up instead and saw him leaning over the edge of the balcony with a big pail in his hands. He held it like he didn't like the job very well. I could see he had a cover on it and was pretty careful to keep the cover in place.

"L-l-look out, fellows!" says he again, and then heaved over the pail. It struck square in the middle of the boat and in a second I heard a sound I recognized. It was an angry sound, the kind of a sound you want to get away from. And right on top of it we heard a yell, and then another yell, and the sound of a wild scramble in the boat.

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But through all the noise the Japanese made I could hear that low, angry sound. It was a sort of humming, singing, stinging buz-zzz-zzzz.

"Whee!" I yelled. "Reinforcements have arrived. Whoop!"

It was reinforcements, all right. More than a million of 'em, I guess, and a million of the best and meanest fighters in the world. We could begin to see them now, a regular cloud of them, and we could see the enemy was in a bad way. They yelled and slapped and scrambled and squealed while our allies went for them. Then they began a retreat that was a rout. With only three oars left they started rowing for the other shore, and, in spite of the speed they made, which was considerable, I'll bet it was the longest ride they ever took.

Just before they got to shore a Japanese stood up and jumped out of the boat, waving his arms around his head and yelling. Another was right on his heels, and the rest followed in quick order. The Man Who Will Come wasn't last, either. They laid right down under the water with nothing showing but their noses—and our allies kept them

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there. Every time a hand showed one of our friends made a dash for it.

"I t-t-told you reinforcements were goin' to come," says Mark, all doubled up with laugh.

They *had* come, and a sort of reinforcement I wouldn't have wanted to call on. I wouldn't have known how to use them if I'd wanted to. Friends like those are hard to handle. Sometimes they don't quite detect the difference between the folks you want them to attack and you. In fact, our allies were the sort of fighters who take a lot of pleasure in attacking anybody, friend or foe.

They were hornets! Regular old warrior hornets! It was a nest of them, 'most as big as a bushel basket, that Mark had thrown down into the boat. It was as bad as a dynamite bomb and more painful, though not quite so dangerous.

While our little fighters were keeping the enemies' minds occupied, they forgot their navy, and it floated off slow.

"Tallow," says Mark, and pointed.

I wasn't crazy about the job he'd picked out for me; not that I was afraid of the Japanese just then—they had all they wanted

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to look for—but I was afraid of the hornets. However, there was nothing for it but to obey orders. If Mark Tidd had the nerve to use their nest for a bomb, I had the nerve to go get that boat. So I plunged in, clothes and all, and swam across.

It wasn't any trick at all to tow back the man-of-war, and not a hornet got me. I calculate they were all busy with the Japanese.

Well, I dragged the boat to shore, and we all celebrated. It was a great victory all around. Mark said it ought to be one of the Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World. We'd licked the enemy, we'd captured their whole navy, and, to cap the climax, we'd captured the little cane that belonged to The Man Who Will Come. That was a battle trophy worth having. Some day we're going to send it to Washington to be put up in a case in the national war museum.

It was an hour before the broken and scattered forces of the enemy dared come out of the water, and when they did they didn't look as though they would be able to take the offensive again for quite a while to come. They were covered with bumps and swellings and they limped and groaned and muttered.

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"P-p-put mud on the stings," Mark called to them. "It 'll take the f-fire out."

Not one of them said a word. They just mugged along to the hotel, a pretty unhappy lot.

"Did you get stung much?" I asked Mark.

"Not once," says he, with a grin.

"How ever did you work it?" says Plunk.

"Well," says Mark, tickled to be getting some more admiration, "I f-found that nest the other day and sat down to figger out how we could use it. It wasn't hard to figger what to do with it, but it took more calc'latin' to f-f-find *how* to do what I wanted to. But there's always some way."

Now that was just like Mark Tidd. Always some way. He believed that. It didn't matter what happened, or what had to be done, he knew there was *some* way to do it, and usually he'd figure and plan and calculate till he found it.

"I got the idee," he went on, "to take the n-nest in a pail and keep the hornets in with a cover. So, when I n-needed 'em I sneaked up and shoved the pail over the nest gentle-like and cautious. Then, mighty quick, I can t-t-tell you, I cut down the nest with the

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cover and s-s-slapped the cover on the pail. It was as easy as p-p-pie."

"Yes," says I, "and it made it easy for the enemy."

Well, that was the last we saw of those Japanese *that* day. I guess the whole army went into the hospital. But we didn't feel like organizing any Red Cross to help their wounded. Not much.

CHAPTER XVI

NEXT morning we saw a little procession come out of the hotel. Walking ahead was The Man, as jaunty as ever, or at least trying to be. A man can't be very jaunty with a limp in his left leg and his eyes swelled 'most shut with hornet stings. Behind him were three Japanese carrying bundles over their shoulders. It looked like they were abandoning the siege.

"Hey, Mark!" I yelled. "Come look! The war's over."

He came hustling and watched the Japanese till they traveled out of sight around the bend of the road.

"We licked 'em," says I.

"Tallow," says Mark, "you m-may be right. I hope so. But—I calc'late you ain't."

"Then what are they goin' away for?"

"To make you think what you thought," says he. "And," he says, "where's the fifth man?"

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Would you believe it, but I hadn't noticed the fifth man wasn't there. That did make it look a bit fishy until I had an idea. "Maybe he was on guard across the lake," says I.

Mark nodded. "Maybe so," he says, "but I guess we won't l-l-lower the drawbridge, for all that. If Motu's worth gettin' he's worth tryin' for harder 'n those f-fellows have tried. And if I'm any judge The Man Who Will Come isn't a quitter."

"A nest of hornets 'll make 'most anybody quit," says I.

"Yes," says he, "but we're just out of h-hornets—and he knows it. He knows we can't be f-f-firin' hornet bombs at him every trip."

"What do you figger they're goin' to do, then?"

"Somethin' we don't f-f-figger on," says he, with a grin. "That man has got a scheme, I'll bet, and it 'll be harder to beat him when he schemes than when he just f-f-fights."

"Well?" says I.

"Well," says he, "we'll get to work strengthenin' our defenses. Plunk and Binney keep watch—and a sharp watch, t-t-too. You and Motu come along."

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I've told you that the citadel was three stories high. The lower floor had been an old boat-house; the second and third floors had been sleeping-rooms for the help and storage. There was just one stairway leading up, and that was outside. It started from the platform facing the hotel and went up to the first balcony; then it took another start from there and went up to the balcony of the third floor. There wasn't any other way to get up.

"Here's our secondary l-line of defense," says Mark, when we got to the stairs. "We'll fix 'em so's they'll be hard to climb. S'pose the enemy should make a landin' on the island. Well, we'll retreat to the second floor—and there won't be any stairs to climb up to us on."

"Goin' to chop 'em down?"

"No," says he. "Goin' to p-p-pull 'em up."

"Can't be done," says I. "They're nailed down."

"I'll show you," says he.

There were some old tools in the boat-house and we got them out. First we drew the nails that held down the bottom of the stairs. Next we braced the stairs so they

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couldn't fall, and sawed through the side-pieces at the top. Mark fixed these just like he had fixed the drawbridge—with hinges. When that was all done he drove staples in the lower step, fastened a rope to them, and led it through another staple in the roof. The end of the rope he tied to a nail at the top of the stairs where it would be handy.

"Let's try her," says I.

We did, and the stairs came up as easy as falling off a log—just raised up against the floor above, and didn't leave a thing to come up on. We lowered them again and braced them with two-by-fours. After that we fixed the stairs between the third and second floors the same way.

"I guess we'll be pretty d-d-difficult to get at up here," says Mark. And I thought so, too.

"Bring the lances," says Mark. And I got them and put them handy at the top of the first stairway.

"Now," says he, "barrin' a surprise, we're in pretty good shape."

When we were all through we were pretty tired and sat down on the ground under the spruce-trees to rest. Mark had a book and

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I got out a Boston paper we had brought with us. It was pretty nearly a week old, but I figured there might be something interesting in it, for all that.

I sort of browsed around in it without finding anything to get excited about, till I came to the third or fourth page, but there was a little piece about two inches long that told how the Japanese minister to the United States had taken a summer place at Fullington in the State we were in, and was planning to stay there till the 1st of September. It told a little about the house and grounds, but that wasn't so interesting.

"Mark," says I, "listen." And I read it to him. "Do you s'pose Motu's got anythin' to do with him?" I whispered it so Motu wouldn't hear. He was a dozen feet off and dozing, anyhow.

"Somehow," says Mark, "I b'lieve this would be as much news to Motu as it is to us."

"Funny thing," says I, "that the Japanese minister would be in this State, and that Motu would be here, and that five other Japs would be if there wasn't some connection."

"Don't b'lieve it," says he. "We'll see."

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He turned and called Motu, who opened his eyes quick and sprang up. "No danger," says Mark, with a grin, "just wanted to ask you a question."

"Of course," says Motu, "I shall be glad to answer."

"Did you know," says Mark, "that the minister f-f-from your country had taken a summer home in this State?"

"*What?*" says Motu, excited in a second.

"He has," says Mark. "Near Fullington, wherever that is. Let's see."

Mark always carried one of those little pocket dictionaries with maps of all the States, and how to tell the number of board feet in a log, and how to get a sliver out of your finger, and how many folks live in Timbuctoo, and how many ounces in a pound, and the area of Greenland, and such-like wisdom. He took it out and found our State and began looking for Fullington. In a minute he found it, and according to the map it was about half an inch from our town.

"F-f-fifty miles to the inch," says Mark. "Then Fullington's only about twenty-five miles from here."

"From town," says I. "We're ten miles

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from town. Maybe Fullington's in the other direction."

"No," says he, "it's almost n-north, and *we're* almost north. So Fullington can't be more'n f-f-fifteen miles."

Mark stopped and looked at Motu. Motu was sitting with his chin in his hands, looking off across the lake, and if I ever saw anybody thinking hard, he was doing it then. We waited quite a while, but Motu kept right on thinking, just as if we weren't there with curiosity oozing out of every inch of us. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer.

"Did you know he was there?" I asked.

"No," says Motu. "It was great surprise to me."

"Do you know him?" says I.

Motu kind of hesitated. "I have seen him in my own country," says he. "Yes, I have even spoken with him."

"A minister to the United States is a pretty great man, isn't he?" says I.

"He is a great man and a good man and a wise man," says Motu. Then he says to himself, like he had forgotten about us again: "Fifteen miles. . . . Only fifteen miles."

Mark winked at me and we got up and went

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away as quiet as we could. Motu never noticed us go, but just looked out across the lake and thought and thought and thought.

"I wonder if Motu's any relation to the minister from Japan?" I says. "Maybe it's his father."

"If the m-m-minister was his father Motu would be apt to know where he lived," says Mark, a bit sarcastic.

"He was a heap interested in the news that the minister was in Fullington," says I.

"I can't make him out. He didn't seem glad, exactly," says Mark. "He didn't seem s-s-sorry, either. Just interested—and speculatin'. I'll bet that right now Motu's figgerin' whether the minister can do him any good, and if he can how we're to get to him."

"Maybe Motu wouldn't want him to know he was besieged here."

"I was thinkin' that," says Mark. "But," he went on, after he'd scowled and pinched his cheek for a couple of minutes, "I think it would be a g-g-good thing if the minister *did* know it—if word was got to him that Motu was here and what was goin' on. Maybe he wouldn't be int'rested a cent's worth, and

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maybe he'd be willin' to give a whole heap to know."

"Anyhow," says I, "he *don't* know, and, furthermore, he ain't likely to find out very soon."

"Tallow," says Mark, sort of solemn, "I believe Motu's somebody p-p-pretty important. This ain't just an ordinary scrape we're in. S'pose somebody important in Japan should come to the United States and some-thin' unpleasant should h-h-happen to him. It would sort of reflect on the United States, wouldn't it? To be sure it would. Besides, how would f-f-folks in Japan look at it? From all I can gather they don't love the United States much. Havin' somethin' happen to a person they honor would make 'em mad, wouldn't it?"

"Likely to," says I, "but 'tain't likely the Japanese nation would get much excited over one boy—or honor him much, either. Motu's all right and I like him, but I don't see as he's any more wonderful than the rest of us. Well, the whole United States isn't honorin' you and me much, are they? I rather guess not. Then neither is Japan honorin' a boy, either."

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"Japan's different. They've got emperors and princes and dukes and such over there. Guess they'd honor a b-b-boy emperor, wouldn't they?"

"You don't calc'late Motu's Emperor of Japan, do you?"

"No, nor a prince, either, nor yet a duke. But he's somebody besides the feller that s-s-sells peanuts on the corner, you can bet."

"What if he is? What are we goin' to do about it?"

"Wish I knew. . . . If there was s-s-some way of doin' it I'd send word to the minister at Fullington, and l-let him do what he wanted to. I wouldn't say anythin' to Motu about it."

"But you can't."

"It l-looks that way. If you're right and the Japanese have gone, then there ain't any need to send. If they h-haven't gone—and I don't much think they have—why, they wouldn't let a messenger get past."

"Correct," says I.

"But," says he, "we m-m-might as well get ready to take advantage of anythin' that h-happened."

"How?" says I.

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"By gettin' the m-m-message all ready to send," says he.

He went mogging off into the citadel where he had some paper and ink and stamps to write to his folks with, and there he sat down and wrote a letter.

THE MINISTER FROM JAPAN [it began].

DEAR SIR,—Are you interested in a Japanese boy named Motu, who owns a short sword with things carved on the blade of it? He is a Samurai, I guess. Anyhow, he talks about them. He is here in an old hotel on Lake Ravona with four American boys. They are besieged by five Japanese men who want to capture Motu. So far we have beaten them. The leader of the enemy is a Japanese man who wears one round eye-glass and carries a cane and wears a Bankok hat and dresses like a dude. He is dangerous, all right. If you are interested you had better hurry along, because things are getting pretty shaky. I never wrote to any Japanese ministers before, so I hope this letter has not done any harm.

Yours truly,
MARCUS AURELIUS FORTUNATUS TIDD.

Mark read it over and then says: "I thought I'd better sign my whole n-n-name when I was writing to a man like that. It l-looks better than just Mark Tidd.

"It looks longer, anyhow," says I. "Now

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what 'll we do with the letter? Throw it overboard in a bottle?"

"Not quite; but we'll put it in an envelope with a stamp on it, and if a c-c-chance comes we'll either d-d-deliver it or mail it."

"Here's hopin'," says I, "that the chance comes pretty quick."

CHAPTER XVII

"TALLOW," says Mark, "have you got the n-n-nerve to swim this lake in the dark?"

"I'd do it in daytime," says I. "It can't be half a mile across, and I could make that like rollin' off a log. But night's a different thing."

I went out and took a look at the lake. It began to look wider to me. That's always the way with things. If you're not going to jump across a hole the hole don't look wide, but just you step up to it ready to jump and it seems to stretch out about twice as big as it was before.

"If I could only have some kind of a mark to steer by—a light or somethin'."

"There's that big h-hemlock," says Mark, pointing. "That will s-s-stick up against the sky, and you could head for it."

"Well," says I, "I'll try it, but I'd rather go to an ice-cream festival. It'll be pretty chilly."

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"We'll rub lard on you," says Mark.

"Rather have it in pie crust," I says, for the idea of being greased up from top to toe didn't set well on my stomach.

"I've been t-thinkin' things over," says Mark, "and it looks to me like it was our duty to try to get this letter sent to the Japanese minister."

"It's a shame," says I, "that there ain't more swimmers in this crowd. I'll turn into a fish."

"You'd better start about an hour before s-s-sun-up," says Mark. "That will get you safe to shore before daylight. Then strike for the road and wait for s-s-somebody to come along. Give 'em the letter to mail."

"Sure," says I, "and what about comin' back?"

"Better get back as soon's you can. They're l-likely to make some kind of an attack."

"All right," says I, "but I calc'late I'll want to lay around a spell in the sun and rest up."

"Take some t-t-towels with you," says Mark.

"What for? Be as wet as I would."

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"Shucks! Use your head. D-d-didn't expect to carry 'em in your mouth, did you? No. Well, just put 'em in a dishpan and float 'em ahead of you. Then you can rub yourself hard and get up circulation. Get you warm in a jiffy."

"Put in my shoes, too," says I. "Climbin' over the rocks ain't good for bare feet."

We didn't see a Japanese before I went to bed, which was pretty early, because I wanted to get in a good sleep. I got it, too. Shouldn't wonder if I'm close to being the world's prize sleeper. Anyhow, I come next to Mark. But he can wake up when he wants to. I never wake up till somebody gets rough with me.

Mark did just that—got rough with me—about three o'clock in the morning, and I turned out in the chilliest morning air you ever felt. It seemed like it would frost-bite you as fast as you got out from under the covers into it. Honest, it was just like sticking your feet into ice-water to shove them out of bed. Right there I lost my ambition to go swimming.

"I guess," says I, "that I've done about all the letter-writin' to the Japanese minister that I need to. I don't owe him any letter."

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"'Tis chilly," says Mark, and he grinned and sort of wriggled all over like he enjoyed something.

"I wish it was you goin'," says I. "Maybe you wouldn't giggle so hard."

"Water 'll be warmer t-t-than the air," says he.

"It could do that and still freeze you to death," I says, as cross as two sticks. "Gimme the letter."

I wrapped a blanket around me to keep me alive till I got to the water. Mark had the dishpan all ready with the towels and my shoes tied into it, and the letter under them.

"Now," says he, "git off the end of the island and s-s-slide in cautious. Likely we're bein' watched every second."

I went off alone into the dark and for once I wished I'd never seen Mark Tidd. I wished he hadn't moved to Wicksville, and I wished he wasn't fat, and I wished he didn't stutter. I just wished he *wasn't* at all. But when I got into the water I felt better. It was surprising how warm and comfortable the water was, after the air. I swam easy and slow till I could get my bearings. It was pretty

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dark, but not so dark but what I could see the black shape of the old hemlock against the sky. When I had it located I laid low and steered for it.

It was a good long swim, but I had swum distances enough to know better than to tire myself out at the start. I just mugged along, stopping to float every once in a while, and before I knew it I was across. It hadn't been anything. The worst part was the lonesomeness of it and the thought that came a couple of times; what would I do if I got cramps? Ugh!

But I didn't. I made it—and then had to get out into that air again. Wow! Cold? It was as cold as Greenland multiplied by Iceland, with Hudson's Bay thrown in to fill the basket.

You better guess that I grabbed those towels and began to rub myself. I rubbed and scrubbed till the skin was ready to come off like the peel of an orange. But it did warm me just like Mark said it would. After I was tired rubbing I picked out an open space and capered up and down in it. I expect I looked like a lunny there in the woods without anything on but a towel tied around the middle

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of me, and me doing some sort of wild Injun dance all by myself. I almost had to laugh.

Pretty soon it began to grow light and I made for the road, going pretty careful. There was no telling where those Japanese might be. It was lucky I did go careful, too, for I hadn't gone a quarter of a mile before I smelled smoke and in a minute saw the glow of a fire.

Right there I stopped navigation. When I went ahead again it was at quarter speed with my hand on the throttle. You've heard about Injuns and how still they can go through the woods. Well, that morning I beat any Injun Cooper ever read about. I made so little noise that the woods were stiller than if I hadn't been there at all.

The fire was down in a little hollow. I skirted around it, but near enough so I could see who was camping there. It was two Japanese, one asleep, the other watching. I laughed inside. He wasn't doing as good a job of watching as he thought he was. I could have plunked him with my slingshot, and I had half a mind to do it. But common sense came along just then and I made tracks away.

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One thing was sure. The Japanese hadn't left us. They were trying to bamboozle us into getting careless, just as Mark had said.

It got lighter and lighter as I went along, and after a while I came to the road. The first thing I did was to find a sheltered place where I could keep out of the breeze, watch the road, and be out of sight. Then I started in to wait.

Waiting is the meanest job in the world. I'd rather do 'most anything else than wait. You keep thinking every minute that what you're waiting for will be along, and then when it don't come you get impatient, and then you get irritable, and then you get mad, and after a long while you just sit there and chaw your knuckles and wish there was somebody to kick.

I'd got to the kicking stage when I heard something coming from away from town. A man was talking.

"Don't yuh stop," he says. "Keep on a-goin'. Jest shove one foot ahead and then foller it with another. If yuh stop agin I calc'late to most take the hide offn you. Whup! Wiggle your ears if you want to. G'wan, now."

In a minute along came a mule with ears

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about a foot long. He was a humorous-looking mule, with a sort of twinkle in his eye. He was dragging a two-wheeled thing the like of which I'd never seen before, and in it was the disappointedest-looking man you ever saw. He wasn't a big man, nor a little man. He was just an in-between man. Not only in size, but I guess in everything else. He was shabby, and his hat was battered, and he hadn't shaved for about two weeks. My, but he looked mournful!

All the time he kept talking to his mule, begging him to keep on going and not to stop, till I stepped out in the road and said good morning.

The mule stopped and spread all four legs like he wasn't willing to be pushed in any direction. He looked like something that somebody had braced up so the wind wouldn't blow it down.

"Good mornin'?" says the man, making a question of it. "Good mornin' nothin'. Look what you've up and done. You've stopped my automobeel. Dumbdest engine in this here automobeel you ever seen."

"Sorry I stopped him," says I, "but I just had to do it."

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The man sighed. "Well, young feller, 'tain't as if I wasn't used to it. It's startin' that hurts my feelin's. Why, when this here automobile of mine decides to start it s'prises me so I come nigh to fallin' off my seat!"

"No!" says I, like I was astonished.

"Yes," says he. "Honest. D'yuh know, I bought this here outfit to travel in. To git from one place to another place. I kind of had it in mind to make a bid for the job of carryin' mail on the rooral free delivery. That's what I done. So I bought me this here automobile. Then d'yuh know what I done?"

"No," says I.

"I built me a garage," says he, pronouncing garage as though you spelled it garagh. "Yes, sir. I up and built me one of them garages. Fine one it was, too. Roof on to it and four sides and a door. Got it done. Looked fust class. Then what did I do but run this here automobile up alongside and show the garage to him." He stopped and rubbed his nose with his sleeve.

"What did he do?" says I.

"Do? Why, young feller, he done what he's doin' now! He reached out with his four

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hoofs and took a holt of the ground and hung on. Ever try to pull a cat offn your coat when she's a notion she wants to stay with you and sticks her claws into the cloth? To be sure. This here automobileel of mine's jest like that. He hung on to the ground, and would he go in? No, he would not. Not any. That was two weeks ago, and he hain't been in yet. I'm a-goin' to take the advice of a hoss-doctor, that's what I be. The critter's out of his head."

"What did you do with him nights?"

"Jest left him. He liked it. Give this here automobileel of mine his choice between standin' with his legs braced, and eatin' a peck of oats, and he'll pick the standin' every time. Ornerly! Jim Sloan says why didn't I p'int his hind quarters toward the garage and pull the other way. Figgered the contrairiness of the critter 'd cause him to back off and go plumb where I wanted him to. Did it work? Naw. Couldn't fool him. Not a mite. All the movin' he done was sideways. Got a scheme now, though."

"What is it?" says I.

"Goin' to peg him down. Four pegs, one to each leg. Hold him tight. Then I'll git

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help and move the garage over him. He! he! he! Guess that 'll s'prise him some."

"Better put your garage on wheels so's it 'll be easy to wheel it around," says I. "Then you can push it over him every night."

"Young feller," says the man, "that's a noble idee. It's wuth the money. Glad you stopped me."

"Much obliged," says I. "What I stopped you for was to get you to carry a letter for me. Just drop it in the post-office."

"Any hurry, young feller?"

"Sort of pressin'," says I.

"I'll do my best, but I hain't guaranteein' nothin'. May be a week 'fore I post it. How far you calc'late I live up the road?"

"Haven't any idea," says I.

"Four miles. How long you calc'late I've been gittin' to here?"

"Half an hour," says I.

"Ho! Half an hour! I swan! Young feller, I've been clost to two days and a night. Started from home that long ago. Spent most of the time beggin' this here automobeel of mine to move. Rests an hour, then gits a move on for a hundred feet, then rests an hour.

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Calc'late I'll git to town along 'bout Christmas."

"Well," says I, "you ain't encouragin', but you're the best chance I've got. Here's the letter. And much obliged."

"Welcome," says he. "Wonder if it 'll go. Dumbdest engine ever was in a automobeel."

I went off and left him pulling and hauling at the mule's ears, trying to get him to start. For fifteen minutes I could hear him arguing with the critter, and then I passed out of sight. I'd been gone from the island and the citadel about four hours and a half, I figured.

CHAPTER XVIII

I STARTED to swim back, pushing my dish-pan ahead of me. The sun began to warm things up and it was a lot more comfortable than it had been on my first trip across. I just poked along, enjoying myself and hoping breakfast would be kept warm for me. That was as near as I came to having breakfast for quite some time. When I got back to the citadel I had something to think about besides eating; in fact, I had before I got to the citadel.

I was about a hundred yards from the citadel and going easy when I heard a splashing off to one side. I raised up, and there, not two hundred feet away, was a raft with two Japanese on it. They hadn't seen me, but were making for the citadel as fast as they could go. I got as low in the water as was possible to anything but a fish, and put on full steam. It was lucky they had such a clumsy raft and such rotten paddles or I couldn't

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have made as good time as they did, but I managed to keep ahead and gain a little.

When I got close to shore I raised my head and let out a bellow:

"Mark Tidd! Hey! Look out!"

I hadn't seen anybody around the citadel and thought maybe the Japanese were going to take them by surprise—and I was right, as I found out later. Plunk had been on watch, and because he was all tired out he had gone to sleep for a few minutes. My yell woke him up, and the rest of them, too. After that things moved fast.

I got to shore and made a dash for some clothes. I wanted more on than a towel if there was going to be a fight. Pants and a shirt aren't exactly armor, but fighting with nothing on at all does make you feel sort of *exposed*. I ducked up the stairs, and as I went I happened to look across to the other side of the island. There came wallowing another raft with two Japanese on it. We were being attacked from two sides.

I gave another yell. Mark came rushing out and saw what was going on.

"G-g-git into your clothes quick," says he; and I did.

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When I came out both rafts were near the shore and Mark and Plunk and Binney were shooting at them with their slingshots, but their attention was divided. I joined in with Plunk, but in a jiffy we saw a third raft coming for the end of our island with The Man Who Will Come on it. Three sides to defend!

"Ho, Mark!" I yelled. "Here comes another detachment."

He just took one look. "Make for the citadel," says he. "Up-stairs, quick, and p-p-pull the stairs after you."

My, but he was excited! and the way he stuttered sounded like hail falling on a tin roof.

We didn't lose a minute, but made for the stairs and hauled them up. When we were safe on the second floor Plunk says:

"What's this for? Now they can land all they want to."

"Yes," says Mark. "We'd 'a' had a f-fine chance to keep them off. Three parties of 'em. We might have kept off one or two, but some of 'em would have been sure to l-land, and where'd we have been? It was good strategy. They forced us to retreat—but it would have been rotten strategy for

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us to have stood and fought. As it is we drew off our army without 1-1-loss and occupied a strong defensive position. If we'd stayed we might have lost an army corps or so."

"Wish we had one of them aeroplanes," says Plunk.

"We hain't," says I. "Nor we hain't got balloons nor submarines. We hain't got anythin'—not even a chance."

"We've got a chance," says Mark, sharp-like, "till we're driven off the roof. We'll make the enemy take this floor, and then we'll r-r-retreat to the next, and then, by Jimminy! we'll take to the roof. I don't want to hear any more talk about no chance. We've got all the chance we need."

All this time we were keeping our eyes on the Japanese, who had landed and seemed sort of surprised they did it so easy. They came cautious-like, because I guess we'd made them think a bit in the last fight and they didn't want to walk *slam* into a trap. They gathered off among the spruce-trees and had a council of war. Then they came toward the citadel in a body, with The Man walking ahead.

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He was considerable improved, but it would be several days before he'd be fit to go to a party. His eye-glass was there, and his dude clothes, but we had his cane. Somehow he didn't look natural without it. It seemed like that cane was a part of him, like it had grown on him.

They came up close, and then Mark gave the word to fire. We let them have several good licks with our slingshots, and they backed off for another talk. Next time they came on the run, and before we could pelt them enough to do any good they were under the gallery where we couldn't hit them. But we could hear them moving around, and, by laying down on our stomachs, we could see them through cracks between the boards.

First they went inside, looking for a stairway, but of course they didn't find any. We were just out of stairways and didn't expect to get any more for quite a while.

We held a council of war ourselves.

"There's just t-three ways they can get up," says Mark. "One is to get the stairs lowered, one is to climb up over the front balcony with l-l-ladders, and the last is to get into a second-story window on the west side with a

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ladder. They can't attack the back. The water keeps 'em off t-t-there."

"If I was goin' to attack," says I, "I'd send three men and maybe four to come up ladders to the front balcony. While they were bangin' around there, attractin' attention, I'd have one man sneak up into one of those west windows, and come creeping across behind us to cut down the stairs."

"G-good for you, Tallow," says Mark. "How would you guard against it?"

"Why," says I, after scratching my head a minute, "I guess I'd fasten the windows so nobody could get in."

"F-f-first class," says Mark. "Now if we could only think of some way to f-fasten 'em."

"Why," says I, "they've got fasteners!"

"Yes," says he, "but how about the glass! They could b-burst it and reach in to unlock 'em."

That was a fact. We couldn't nail them, because we didn't have any nails, and anyhow, it wouldn't have done much good, for a man who had his mind set on it could have smashed through, anyhow.

"There ain't but one way," says Mark, "to keep the Japanese out of those windows,

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and that's to w-w-watch 'em. All the time we've got to keep track of f-five Japanese. Somebody's got to keep his eye on the windows, somebody's got to watch the s-stairs, and the rest of us have got to be ready for an attack here in front."

"Good!" says I. "Post your guards."

"Ever read of cliff-dwellers?" says Mark.

"I've heard tell of 'em. But right now I'm more curious about Japanese."

"Huh!" says he. "We m-m-might as well get as much pleasure out of this mix-up as possible. You can get p-pleasure out of sittin' on a tack if you go at it right. We'll pretend we're cliff-dwellers in a stone castle up on a shelf on a m-mountain. The only way to attack us is to scale the cliff with ladders. A tribe of the enemy has come down on to us."

"I've heard," says Plunk, "that cliff-dwellers ate dogs."

"Guess," says Mark, with a grin, "we won't pretend that far. Motu's dog don't look like he'd cut up into good steaks."

"That satisfies me," says Binney. "Cliff-dwellers we are, and, if my ears 'ain't gone to dreamin', those enemies are gettin' ready to stir up somethin'."

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"Quick!" says Mark. "You, Binney, get to the west cliff where the leetle cave openin's are. Plunk, you watch the m-main ladder that's hauled up. Motu and Tallow and I will f-f-fight off the main attack if it comes."

It came, all right. There wasn't any pretending about that. One Japanese scooted out and cut the rope that held the drawbridge, and down she dropped. Then two more put their heads down low so we couldn't get a good pelt at them and ran as fast as they could across to the hotel.

They were gone about three minutes when we saw them coming back with a ladder—with two ladders. One was a long ladder, the other was short. We made it as pleasant and sociable for them as possible, but they dashed under cover in spite of all we could do.

"L-l-lances ready," says Mark. Then he raised his voice and yelled to Plunk and Binney. "Keep your eyes open, guards."

I leaned over the railing and out came three Japanese with the ladders, and what do you think they had on to protect them from shots from above? Bushel baskets! Yes, sir, every one of them had a basket on his head. They

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looked like some newfangled kind of mud-turtle.

"Look!" says I to Mark.

He looked and shook his head and grinned sort of admiring.

"I knew that Man Who Will Come was a s-s-smart one," says he. "Couldn't have invented b-better armor. Slingshots ain't any good now."

"Might hit their fingers," says I.

"Waste of time tryin'," says he. "Lances are the thing. Don't let 'em p-plant their ladders against the cliff. As soon as a man gets near with a l-ladder give it a shove and topple it over." He stopped a minute. "Don't see anythin' of The Man or the other Jap, do you?"

"No," says I.

"Well," says he, "we'll have to trust to the guards."

The men were raising their ladders. The shorter one got in reach first and Mark gave it a shove that sent it and the man who had it over on to the ground with a good sound flop. That didn't stop the two with the big ladder. They used different tactics. Off they got a ways and then pointed the ladder at the railing

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like a battering-ram, and came on with a run. We had as much chance of stopping it as a hippopotamus has of climbing a cherry-tree.

Bang! went the ladder against the railing, and as soon as it struck the men jumped on it to hold it down. We pushed and pried, but it only wobbled. It was too heavy for us.

"S-sideways," says Mark. "Shove sideways."

That was a real idea. We both got on one side and pushed. The ladder moved a foot. By now the first man was half-way up.

"Shove hard!" says Mark. "*Now!*"

All three of us put our weight against it and it started, slow at first, but gradually getting faster, until it went with a swoop. The top man jumped all sprawled out and rolled over a couple of times when he struck.

"Whoop!" says I.

Mark grinned, and so did Motu.

"Good!" says Motu. "That will stop them for one moment. It is like the sieges of ancient strongholds in stories of my grandfather."

They got up their ladders and tried again, but now we had the trick of it and put them over easy.

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"I wish," says Mark, "I knew what The Man is d-d-doin'."

"Restin'," says I.

"Not him," says Mark. "He's got a scheme. This attack in f-front wasn't expected to win. He'd know better. It's to cover up somethin' m-more serious."

"Well," says I, "all we can do is wait and 'tend to matters as they come."

"I ain't so sure," says Mark. "You f-f-fellows stay here. I want to go back by the side."

He went. Motu and I watched the Japanese drag the ladders under the porch and listened to them jabber. Motu understood what they were saying and grinned at me friendly and sort of proud.

"They say, 'Boys be great warriors some day.' Also they are saying, 'We have been told Americans cannot fight, and do not want to fight. We have been told Japan with a little army could win from America with big army; but if the men fight like the boys, it is not so.' That is good to hear, Tallow. I wish all Japanese could hear it. I wish it because all good Japanese—all men who think—have a great friendship for the United

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States. We do not like talk of war. We like to think only of peace forever. But some there are who have hot heads—just as you have hotheads in America. They see insults where there are no insults. They blame all America for what one part of America does. It hurts Japanese pride to be treated as we are by California—yet California has reasons. Thinking men know that. So I wish all hot-heads might know how great America is and what fighting-men she raises.” Motu stopped a moment and raised his head in a dignified kind of way. “Not,” says he, “that Japan fears good warriors and would make war only on the weak. Russia was not weak, but those who talk war most go to war least. A little fear would make them cautious. So I wish all could know the warrior spirit that sleeps in America, that they might never awake it.”

“Me, too,” says I. “If all Japanese were like you, Motu, I guess there wouldn’t be any row at all.”

Motu smiled. “Not all have the advantage to see America and England and the world that I have. They live at home and their vision is narrow. They cannot understand. But some day I shall teach them.”

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He caught himself suddenly and looked at me; then he went on as if he would make me think he had said what he didn't exactly mean: "Some day I will do all a common boy can do to make them know. I will tell many friends."

"Sure," says I, but I wasn't fooled. Right there I was convinced that Motu was pretty important and powerful at home in Japan. You could tell it by the way he spoke when he wasn't thinking.

All of a sudden Plunk let out a yell.

"Hey!" says he. "Git away from there! Git! I'll lam you good!" he says.

Motu and I ran around the corner and saw Plunk poking his lance at somebody through the stairway. Just then Mark Tidd came out of the door, rolling a big barrel that he'd found. He frowned at us.

"Your p-p-place is in front," says he. "Git back there quick."

He was right about it. We had left our station unguarded.

"What's the matter?" I yelled at Plunk.

"Man tryin' to cut the rope that holds up the stairs," says he, "and I'm pokin' away his knife. He's got it tied to a pole."

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Motu and I hurried around in front and got there just in time, for two Japanese were trying to sneak up a ladder, quiet, without hearing. From then on we didn't have time to bother about Plunk and his troubles.

CHAPTER XIX

MOTU and I soon disposed of the two Japanese and their ladder. As soon as they had picked themselves up we heard The Man Who Will Come calling to them. Motu said he was telling them to quit monkey-ing around there and come to help him.

"I will watch here," says Motu. "You go to help Mark Tidd."

I was willing enough because I wanted to see what was going on, so I ran around the corner just in time to see Mark leaning as far over as the size of him would allow and smearing something on the stairs where they were hauled up.

"What you doin'?" I asked. "Feedin' them?"

"Sure," says he, without so much as the shadow of a smile. "They was askin' for f-f-food, so I'm rubbin' it into 'em. It was in this barrel." He pointed to the big barrel I'd seen him rolling out.

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I went over and looked. In the bottom of the barrel was about a pailful of some messy-looking stuff—soft soap or something like that.

"What's the idee?" I asked him.

"M-makin' the stairs easy to walk up," says he.

I didn't quite understand, but it wasn't very many hours before I understood good and plenty—and it was one of the slickest sights Mark Tidd ever arranged.

Mark went right on daubing the messy stuff on the stairs as thick as he could get it, while Plunk kept poking away at the knife a Japanese was trying to cut the rope with.

"I wish that rope was wire," says I. "It wouldn't be so easy to cut."

Mark straightened up and looked at me. "Tallow," says he, "that idee was worth your board for the rest of the summer. There's a coil of w-w-wire clothes-line hangin' up in there. Get it."

I found it hanging on a nail and brought it along. By that time Mark was done daubing, and he took the wire and rigged it alongside the rope to the stairs that led up to the third floor.

"We'll use the r-rope to haul up the stairs,"

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says he, "if it gets so we have to h-haul 'em up. Then we'll f-f-fasten 'em with the wire. Tallow, I'm proud of you. You're promoted. For this wire idee I dub thee knight. Git down on your knees."

"Don't b'lieve cliff-dwellers had knights," says I.

"We're the kind that does," says he. "Kneel."

I grinned sort of foolish, I expect, and got down. He tapped me on the shoulder with the stick he had been using and says:

"Rise, Sir Tallow Martin. I dub thee knight." With that he put a smear of the messy stuff on my cheek and chuckled. "I daub the knight, too," says he. "That 'll make it all the stronger."

"It was plenty powerful enough without," says I.

All of a sudden the stairs dropped with a bang. Plunk had missed the knife with his lance and the Japanese had cut the rope.

"Ready to repel attack," Mark shouted, and grabbed his lance.

Plunk had his and so did I. Mark and I stood plumb at the head of the stairs, while Plunk stood over to the side to take the enemy

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on the flank. No sooner did the stairs drop than three Japanese made a wild jump on to them. One man was ahead and made a bound up three steps. The others were right on his heels. Well, sir, what followed was too good to be true. The top man no sooner landed on the step than both his feet went *slap* out from under him and he sprawled on his face. His heels flew back and swatted the two behind, and *they* went down, and *all* of them rolled over and over to the floor in a tangle. I caught a glimpse of their faces and you never saw anybody look so surprised and startled and mad all at once.

"*Wumph!*" the first fellow says when he landed, and "*Wough!*" says the other two fellows when his heels hit them in the stum-micks. I guess it knocked the wind clean out of them, for they all sat on the floor gasping and hanging on to their waist-lines like they thought somebody was going to try to steal them. They didn't get right up. You could see they weren't ready to stand up, not any of them. They were perfectly willing to rest a bit.

In a minute The Man came in sight and began jabbering at them. At first they

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didn't do anything but goggle at him and groan and pant, but he tongue-lashed them till they got on to their feet pretty slow and painful.

The Man pointed at the stairs and says something in a commanding voice. The three started at us again, but there wasn't any rush about it. They had their plateful of rushing on those stairs. No, sir, they didn't hurry a bit. You'd have thought maybe they were climbing up to have a tooth pulled, hanging on to the rail and stepping soft and easy. Even at that the stairs were so slippery they could hardly hold their feet.

We stood at the top and laughed at them. That was about all we could do. We laughed, but that didn't mean we were easy in our minds—I should say not. Those fellows looked *mad*. I felt as if somebody was waving his hand up and down inside my stummick, and my legs were trembly, and I wished I was back in Michigan with lots of room to run.

"How d'you feel?" says I to Mark.

"Lonesome," says he, and grinned sickly-like.

That was the very word for it. There was company enough, too much of it if you come

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to that, but I was never so lonesome before, and I don't expect ever to be so lonesome again.

The first man, hanging on to the rail with one hand, was near enough now so Plunk could swipe at him with his lance. The lance, you remember, was a long stick with a wad on the end bigger than a boxing-glove. It wouldn't hurt anybody much to get a wallop with it, but it would bother them considerable. It bothered the Japanese, for Plunk drew back and gave him a good one right alongside the ear.

The man grunted and threw up his arm. Plunk banged him again, and he sort of wobbled.

"Poke him quick while he's off his b-b-b-balance!" yelled Mark; and Plunk did.

The Jap did a funny little dance on his toes, grabbed for the rail and missed it, whirled around with his arms wagging, and sat down *ker-sloosh!* Then he coasted right against the legs of the other two and pushed their feet off the steps so they plumped down right on top of him like he was a sled, and coasted all the way down on him. I'll bet he enjoyed it!

"T-t-toboggan slide," Mark says. "Guess

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they don't have 'em in Japan. They act like they didn't understand slidin' very well."

"I thought," says I, "that they made a pretty good slide for beginners."

"'Twan't graceful," says Plunk. "I like to see folks slide pretty and neat. These fellers is clumsy as all-git-out."

The three picked themselves up after they'd felt of their shins and rubbed their ribs and grunted considerable. The Man, dapper as ever, with his glass in his eye, stood scowling at them. He never looked up at us once. For a while he didn't say anything; then he spoke in Japanese and they all went away.

"Whee!" says I. "Attack's repulsed."

"Huh!" Mark grunted. "It hasn't b-b-be-gun yet. The Man's got a scheme. Just wait."

We didn't have to wait long, for in three minutes they were back, each one of them carrying a pail—of sand.

"What 're they goin' to do with that?" says Plunk. "Throw it in our eyes?"

"How do you stop an engine on a slippery track?" Mark asked.

"Put sand in front of the drivers," says Plunk.

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"Well," says he, "pertend these Japanese was engines and the stairs was a t-t-track. What then?"

It was plain enough now. The Man had found a way to get ahead of Mark's greasy scheme. They began putting sand on the stairs thick. First they covered the bottom step and then worked up a step at a time, fixing each one so they had a firm footing. Of course they couldn't get to the four or five top steps, because we were there to see they didn't, but they did the best they could.

Then they stood out of reach and tossed up sand so it fell on the steps that were still greasy. They kept it up till every step was covered, and then they made another attack.

It was lucky the stairs were narrow so only one man could come at us at a time, but that didn't stop them. They came like they meant business. The first man crouched and jumped. Mark poked him while he was in the air and he stumbled and went down on his knees. But there he stuck. There wasn't any more coasting, on account of the sand. He got up again and stood with his hands like a boxer, ready to grab the first lance that was shoved at him. On he came.

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Mark fainted for his face, and when he threw up his hands, changed his aim of a sudden and lammed him in the stummick. At the same time Plunk let him have one in the ear and I reached through and gave his ankle a shove. It upset him again.

The others caught him and shoved him ahead. I guess they figured on using him as a shield, but he didn't appear to like that idea much, for he wiggled and squirmed and yelled. We were sorry for him—of course we were—but business was business and we gave it to him good. *Thud! thud! thud! thud!* went the padded ends of our lances against his ribs and his head and wherever we could reach.

It wasn't any use. The stairs were narrow and steep, and they couldn't get a firm footing in spite of their sand, and we forced them back, a step at a time, until Mark and I were standing half-way down the stairs. We didn't go any farther, but there we stood and beat them back as fast as they came on.

Then what did The Man do but get an eighteen-foot two-by-four and put his men on it. They came at us like a battering-ram, and you'd better believe we had to scatter.

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Up the stairs they charged, but when their ram was past the head of the flight we were ready for them again. The farther they came the farther past us their ram went—and we could get in range with our lances.

It was hot work and hard work, but we forced them back once more and managed to grab their two-by-four when they dropped it. It was our second trophy of the war. First The Man's little cane, and now the battering-ram. We treated ourselves to a cheer, though we didn't have a great supply of wind to cheer with.

Now came a lull in the attack. I guess the enemy had run out of ambition, or maybe The Man was fussing around to get some new idea. He had done pretty well so far with his ideas, and, taking the whole campaign into consideration, we had a little the worst of it, for we had lost the bridge and the island, and were besieged in the citadel. But that didn't mean we were licked. The hardest fights in a siege come when the citadel itself has to be taken, and the Japanese were finding that out.

We hadn't used all our resources, either, for Binney and Motu were keeping guard, and the dog was tied up to be sure he would be

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out of the way. Mark sort of figured the dog might come in handy sometime, but he didn't want to use him if he didn't have to, because the Japanese wouldn't care whether they hurt the dog or not, and they would be a little mite careful what they did to us.

We weren't afraid of what would happen to us, anyhow. The worst would be a little rough handling. What we were worried about was their capturing Motu.

The Japanese had disappeared from the foot of the stairway, and Mark went to warn the guards to keep their eyes wide open. Then he came back and we sat down to wait developments. Below somewhere we heard the noise of hammering, and Mark says:

"I'll bet here's where we l-l-lose this stairway. If The Man's thinkin' of the same scheme I am he can d-drive us back."

"What then?" says I, sort of startled.

"Then," says he, "we make for the t-third floor. They can't cut down the stairs there and they can't reach us with ladders. It's our strongest p-place."

"Grub up there?"

"Every ounce of it," says Mark.

"Why not sneak up there, then?" says I.

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"Because," says he, "we want to take up every m-minute of time we can. Every hour we save is in our f-favor. Here they've been half a d-day tryin' to take this stairway. More'n that, I guess." He took out his watch and looked at it. Then he wrinkled up his face and felt of his stomach. "Thought I felt sort of funny," says he. "Know what t-time it is?"

"No," says I.

"Three o'clock," says he.

You can believe now that we had been having a pretty busy and exciting time. The best proof of it that I could give you was just this—that Mark Tidd forgot it was dinner-time. He had gone three hours past meal-time and never noticed it.

"I'm goin' to eat," says he, "Japs or no Japs."

"Fetch down enough for the crowd," says I.

He waddled up-stairs, and in ten minutes came back with two ham sandwiches for each of us. We had a whole boiled ham, and enough bread to run us. They were good, generous sandwiches with a slice of ham in them that you could taste when you bit, and mustard. When Mark Tidd fixed something

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to eat he fixed it so nobody in the world could complain, and so he couldn't complain himself. There was as much difference between these sandwiches of his and the kind you buy as there is between getting hit with a hammer and getting hit with a feather. When the five of us got through there wasn't a crum left that would pay for a bird's time picking it up. Mark didn't forget the dog, either, but gave him a bone.

"Wish I had a drink," says I.

Mark looked at me and then at Plunk. "Water!" says he.

"Ain't there none?" says Plunk.

"Not a drop," says Mark. "It's all downstairs."

"Hum!" says I, sort of significant.

"Go on and hum," says Mark. "It's my fault, all right, but I guess it ain't s-s-serious. The lake's right below us."

"And when we get thirsty we can go to look at it, I suppose," I says, as sarcastic as I could get.

"If you're thirsty," says Mark, "s'pose you f-f-find some way to get water. It's near enough."

"We can let down a bucket with a rope,"

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I says, for that idea just popped into my head. I should have thought of it before.

"Go ahead," says Mark.

I went to get a bucket, but not a bucket could I find. I hunted high and low and cross-ways and sideways, but not a sign of a bucket was there. Not a bucket nor a pail nor anything that I could see that would hold water. I went back and told Mark so.

"Huh!" says he. "I could have told you. And if you'd f-f-found a bucket there wouldn't have been any rope."

"How long can a man live without water?" says I, getting all-fired thirsty all at once.

"A camel can live eight d-d-days," says he, as sober as a judge.

"I ain't a camel," says I, getting pretty mad at the cool way he took it.

"We'll have to stand it as long as we can," says Mark. "It was a bad blunder. Worst I ever made, I guess. But," says he, his little eyes sort of glinting, "I'll be so dry the wind 'll blow me away before I s-s-surrender."

"They say," says I, still good and mad, "that the human body is three-quarters water. If that's so there's enough water mixed up

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with you to quench the thirst of General Grant's armies."

For once he didn't say anything back, but he stored that up in his mind, you'd better believe, with the idea of getting even with me when the chance came. But that didn't worry me. It was enough worry to think about being shut up for days without anything to drink.

I sat down on the railing and looked out over the lake, just thinking of things, general like. I must have got interested in what I was thinking about, for the next thing I knew I heard a voice over past the hotel yelling:

"Can't you tell when I got the brake on, eh? Say! What kind of a *automobeel* be you, anyhow? I've throwed out the clutch and slammed on the brake, but you don't pay no more 'tention than as if I hadn't done nothin' at all. Whoa, there!"

It was my friend that I'd met on the road and got to deliver the message. What he was doing here I couldn't for the life of me guess, but I figured he'd come out of curiosity to find out what was going on. I called Mark and the boys.

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The old fellow managed to stop his "engine" and sat staring over at us. I waved my hand and yelled at him—and then The Man and his followers just *boiled* across the bridge and went for the old fellow. He saw them coming and began to jerk and slap his lines.

"Hey, you!" he yelled. "Hain't I pressed the self-starter button, eh? Then why don't you start? Hain't the lever in low? Git a stir on to you!"

But the animal never stirred. The old fellow stood up and larruped him with the lines, but he just sort of humped his back and laid down his ears and took root. Then The Man and his folks got there. One of them set out to grab the mule. The mule turned and looked him right in the face, and then something happened. You never saw an engine explode, I'll bet you. Neither did I, but that's the nearest I can imagine to what that mule did. He just naturally up and exploded. First he opened his mouth and let out a holler that was enough to raise the dead, and then he lashed out with all four feet and his tail, and tried to bite with his teeth. You can bet those Japanese backed

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off a little. The old fellow didn't seem to mind a bit. He just spread his legs so the mule could kick free and waited. All at once the mule quit kicking and started off straight ahead.

"The lever's in high," yelled the old fellow.

This time I guess the mule knew right where the lever was, for the way he got out of there was a caution. If he wasn't doing forty miles an hour then I don't want a cent. The Japanese tried to stop him, but he nipped one on the arm and came pretty close to running right over the top of another. Whee! but they scattered.

The old fellow turned around and sort of waved his hand at us. Then he put his thumb to his nose and wiggled his fingers at the Japanese. That was the last we saw of him, for the mule yanked him around a clump of trees and out of sight.

I looked at Mark and grinned, and Mark looked at me.

"Well?" says he

"Same here," says I.

"It 'll mean quick trouble f-f-for us," says he. "The Japs 'll be afraid he'll go after h-help."

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"Not him," says I. "Bet he don't know enough. Seems like he was sort of crazy or somethin'."

Mark shook his head. "You n-never can tell," says he.

CHAPTER XX

THE hammering down below kept on steadily for an hour or so. Then there was silence for quite a while, I expect while The Man's army was getting rested and recovering its grit. It was beginning to grow dusk before we saw a single Japanese.

Mark held a council of war. It wasn't much of a council, if that word means people talking together and offering one another advice. Mark did most of the talking and all of the advising. It wasn't because he wouldn't accept advice. No, sir. He wasn't that sort of fellow at all. He was always glad to listen and to change his own plan if somebody offered a better one, but right now he was the only one that had any plan. *Mostly* he was. The rest of us fellows were pretty good at doing things we were told, and maybe we were up to the average on brains, but Mark was a little out of the ordinary there. Anyhow, he had a different kind of brain. It was

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the kind that can't help scheming and figuring. So the council of war consisted mainly in his telling us what to do.

"We can't hold this l-l-line of defenses," says he. "It won't be long before we have to make a strategic retirement to the next floor. That's our last stronghold, and it's the s-s-strongest. We can hold out there till—"

"Till it rains, I hope," says I. "Then we'll get a drink."

"Is that still on your mind, Tallow? Well, the first minute I have to spare I'll get you a drink."

"Is that a promise?" says I.

"Yes," says he.

That settled it. If Mark Tidd said he'd get water, then water would be got. I was satisfied.

"How you goin' to get it?" Plunk says.

"I don't know yet," says Mark. Now wasn't that just like him! He knew there must be *some* way of getting water up there, and he was sure, if there was a way, he could find it. I wish I was as confident of myself as that. Maybe that's why Mark is more thought of by folks than we are—because he

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never gives up, and because he knows if anybody can do a thing he can do it, too.

"We'll have to r-r-retreat," says he. "Maybe not at the next attack, but soon. If The Man uses the scheme I'm thinkin' of we'll retreat right sudden."

"Will we have time," says I, "to run up the stairs and pull them up after us?"

"I've f-f-fixed it so we will," says he. You see, he'd thought it all out and was ready for anything. Of course he did make mistakes once in a while, like forgetting the water, but that was seldom. As Uncle Ike Bond said when he bought a citron because his bad eyesight made him think it was a muskmelon, "The best of us 'll make mistakes."

"Now," says Mark, "we want to know when to r-r-retreat. The two guards want to know b-because they've got farther to run. We'll have to have a signal. The minute they hear it, or you hear it, forget everything but how to get to the t-t-top of those stairs the quickest way there is. The signal will be two screeches like this." He showed us, and they were screeches for certain. A catamount would have been so proud of them he'd have jumped out of his skin. I guess a

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catamount that could yowl like that would be a sort of opera-singer among his folks, and they'd pay to hear him perform.

"Will that do?" says Mark.

"Do?" says I. "Yell like that and we won't have to retreat. It 'll scare the Japs stiff so they'll fall down-stairs and bu'st their necks."

"All right," says he. "You, Tallow, go and tell Motu and Binney."

I went off to tell them. Motu was leaning on the railing, looking over, when I got there.

"How's business?" says I.

He looked at me sort of blank. Then he smiled so all his fine white teeth showed between his lips. "Ha! Tallow, it is an American question. I understand. To be sure. How is business? There has not been business. I have not had a single—what do you say?—a single customer." He stopped and looked sort of disappointed. "You boys have had all the fighting," he says. "You fight for Motu, yet Motu has no part in it."

"Don't let that worry you," says I. "Guardin' is as important as fightin', and harder to do, I expect. Besides," says I, "if you was tryin' to keep pirates from capturin' a treasure you wouldn't bring it

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right up to the fightin'-line where they could grab it and run. No, sir, you'd keep it back where it would be safe. Well, Motu, you're our treasure after a manner of speaking. We're tryin' to keep the Japanese from takin' you, so we want you back where they can't haul you off in the mix-up. That's strategy."

"Strategy maybe," says he, "but not honorable strategy for the treasure. Where others fight for you you should fight also for yourself, and not in the rear rank, but in front. Let no man be struck a blow in your defense that you yourself can take. So my father taught me."

I sort of figured it out that Motu had the right sort of a father. My grandfather fought in our war, and that's exactly the sort of thing he used to tell me. He was great on honor, granddad was. I told Motu about him because I didn't want him to think American boys weren't taught about honor as much as Japanese boys were.

"You'll get enough fightin' before we're through with this," says I, "so don't worry about takin' a little rest."

Then I went on and told Binney, who hadn't seen any of the enemy, either. He was wor-

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ried, though, about a spruce-tree that grew pretty close to a window. He'd been thinking that maybe a man could climb it and get out on a limb that almost touched the wall, and from there jump smack through a window. It looked possible to me.

By this time it was getting quite dark and I hurried back to the stairs where Plunk and Mark were sitting. Mark had another big sandwich for each of us, so I carried supplies to Motu and Binney. Both of them asked for water, so I told them we were just out of it, but would have a fresh supply soon. Binney kicked a little about it, but Motu just smiled and said, "If we have to have water your Mark Tidd will get it."

I went back to my place again. Mark had a couple of blankets spread on the floor. "Two men s-s-sleep," says he. "You and Plunk take t-t-turns with Binney and Motu."

"How about you?" says I.

"No sleep for me to-night," he said, with that look around his jaw that means there's no use arguing. "I'm the general of this army and my b-b-business is to be on the job."

"That 'll give you a little time to think

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about gettin' water, then," says I, for I was still considerable r'iled up about that.

Mark grinned like the cat that ate the canary-bird. He always grins like that when he's got the best of you, so I knew he had been figuring about water and had found a way to get it.

"There's a f-f-five-pound pancake-flour bag up with the provisions," says he. "Fetch it down."

I ran up and got it, and then sat down to see what was going to happen. Mark took the bag and measured it careful. Then he took some of the clothes-line wire—there was about six feet of it left—and twisted and turned and braided it into a hoop just a mite smaller than the top of the bag. When that was done he put it inside the bag about two inches down and folded the thick, tough paper over it. Then, with string out of his pocket, he wound it over and over, punching holes every little ways to pass the string through. He was mighty careful and particular about it. When it was all done he had a bucket that would hold a good gallon of water. Another short piece of wire made the handle.

"There," says he, "that 'll hold water."

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"Yes," says I, "but the water's quite a step down. How you goin' to reach it?"

"The enemy f-f-furnished us somethin' to reach it with," says he, pointing to the two-by-four we had captured. "That 'll reach, I calc'late."

Sure enough, it would. All we had to do was drive a nail in the end and make a hook of it to hold the pail. I was so thirsty I could hardly wait, so I grabbed the contraption as soon as Mark finished it and rushed off to where I could reach water. It worked a little clumsy, but it did the business. I didn't have much trouble filling the pail.

You'd better believe water never tasted so good before. Mark was perfectly willing to drink, and Plunk got away with about a quart. Motu didn't act very excited about it, though he drank hearty enough.

"I told you," says he, "that your Mark Tidd could do it."

Binney was last to get a drink. That half-emptied the pail.

"Pour the rest in another paper bag," says Mark, "and tie it with a string. Hang it up-stairs. M-m-most of it will stay long enough. Then f-fill your bucket again and

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hang that up-stairs. We won't run any more risks."

"Listen," says Plunk.

It was now pretty dark. The moon showed just a little, but there were clouds which kept covering it up, and when they did you couldn't see a dozen feet away. But you could hear. We listened like Plunk told us to, and heard several men scurrying around down below. Then the moon popped out the clearest it had been and we saw!

"My scheme," says Mark, under his breath. "I knew he'd f-f-figger it out."

It was a scheme, all right. The Man had made a regular lean-to of planks. It was just as wide as the stairs and high enough to cover a man. Other planks about three feet long made a roof to it so we couldn't get at the attackers from above. One man was right behind it, and all four of the others were close to him, hanging on to a two-by-four that pushed it. It was a sort of battering-ram except that you didn't batter with it—you just pushed it along in front of you and shoved anybody out of the way. There wasn't a way in the world for us to stop them.

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"Better screech them screeches," says I to Mark.

"Just a minute," says he. "Help me with that b-b-barrel."

Mark had the barrel half-full of heavy stuff. The barrel itself was one of those big oil-barrels, and weighed about a ton. We rolled it to the top of the stairs.

"Wait till I give the w-w-word," says he. "When I let out the signal, give her a shove."

We waited till the portable fort was a quarter of the way up, then Mark opened his mouth and gave the two screeches. They were better than the sample he had given us before. At that we both pushed and down rushed and bumped and clattered the barrel. It got under way and began to jump. The last five steps before it reached the movable fort never were touched at all. The barrel just seemed to come to life and leap at the enemy like it was trained. Maybe it was. I wouldn't be surprised if Mark had found some way to train it.

Anyhow, it jumped at those Japs and hit their shelter just above the center. Maybe it didn't hit it. Wow! That barrel and the

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things in it must have weighed a couple of hundred pounds and it was going fast.

"Scoot!" says Mark to Plunk and me.

I stopped just long enough to see the shelter smash backward and break away from the two-by-four that pushed it. The barrel went right over it, and you should have seen those Japanese hop out of the way. Then I headed up like I'd been sent for in a hurry. Plunk beat me, Binney was right at my heels, next came Motu, and Mark brought up the rear.

"Quick!" says he. "Haul up the r-r-rope."

We grabbed her and pulled. It wasn't a second too soon for The Man himself came bounding up the stairs below and made a jump for the end of the stairs we were pulling up. He caught it, too, and hung there.

"Motu," says Mark, "ask him to g-g-get off."

Motu grinned and grabbed his lance. You could see he had a job he liked. He went to where he could reach The Man, whose hands were now on a level with our floor, and reached under. I saw him draw back his lance for a jab, and the jab went home. Right into The Man's stummick it went.

"Wourgh!" says The Man, or something

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that sounded like it, and dropped like a stone. He sat where he fell, or rather rolled over on his side with both arms folded across his belt-line, and there he stayed till a couple of his men came and picked him up. He didn't act very chipper for ten minutes.

"Here we are," says Mark, fastening the wire that held up the stairs. "They can't cut this, and they can't g-g-get to us with l-ladders. If they come they've got to come through the floor, in an airship, or up these s-stairs."

"It is a strong place to defend," says Motu. "But hunger and thirst are stronger. For a time we can hold out. Maybe days, maybe a week, but in the end we must give up. Is it not so, Mark Tidd?"

"I've got an idee," says Mark, "that any givin' up that's d-d-done won't be done by us."

CHAPTER XXI

THE Japanese came stamping and jabbering around under us, but that didn't do any particular good that I could see, and after a while they quieted down. I guess they were pretty tired after their day's work, and wanted a rest. Anyhow, they didn't bother us again that night.

The first thing Mark had us do was make stronger the fastening of the stairs. It was held by a double wire and a rope. We used up all the wire we had left putting on more fastenings, and when we got through we felt pretty safe for a while. It would take anybody more than a minute to get those stairs down, we were certain.

Now we were so high up they didn't have any ladders that could reach us, and we didn't need to bother watching anything but the stairs, so four of us went to sleep while one watched. Plunk was the unlucky one. He drew the shortest stick. He was to watch

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from nine till twelve, Binney from twelve to three, and Motu the rest of the night. When that was arranged I rolled up in my blanket on the floor and went to sleep.

Maybe you'll say that wasn't a comfortable bed, but it suited me. I was perfectly satisfied. The way I felt I guess I'd have been glad to lie down on a pile of cobblestones with a boulder for a pillow. I went to sleep so quick I hardly remember lying down, and I never wiggled till morning. From nine till six I slept and would have been willing to go on for a couple of hours more, but Mark Tidd shook me and yelled in my ear that breakfast was ready, such as it was.

While we were eating I got to thinking about things and says to Mark, "If they find any way to get these stairs down we're goners, because they can use their movable fort and come prancing right up to us."

"I've b-been calc'latin' about that fort," says Mark, "and I guess I wasn't very smart not to see a way to stop it before. They won't get us with that thingumbob," he says.

"How'll you stop 'em?" says I.

"With that s-scantling we captured. It's

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come in handy, 'ain't it? Got water with it. Now we'll stop the fort with it."

"How?"

"Easy. When they s-start up—if they ever do—we'll just jam one end of our two-by-four against their fort and the other end of it against a step. They'll have to shove the whole citadel over into the l-l-lake to move. It 'll be just like p-pushin' against a stone wall."

"Then what?" says I.

"Then," says he, "they'll have to come out and fight. We've got better than an even chance there."

"Where's the dog?" says I, thinking of him all of a sudden.

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "D-d-downstairs," says he. "I left him on p-purpose. If we had him we might use him, and it sort of goes against the grain to be f-fightin' men with a dog."

"I'd fight 'em with a crocodile if I had one," says I, and let it go at that.

"They ought to be projectin' around pretty soon," says Binney. "If they leave us alone much longer we'll get all out of the habit of squabblin' with 'em."

"Don't worry," says Mark. "We won't

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have t-t-time to form any habits. We ain't apt to have time to *spell* habit unless we do it two letters at a time."

"Some one's down there now," says Plunk.

"The Man's b-been lookin' over our defenses quite a spell," says Mark. "I've noticed him p-p-prowlin' around."

"Then," says Motu, "we may expect a stirring up of something directly."

Of course, as soon as The Man saw the way we had the stairs fastened up with stout wire he'd know there wasn't any use trying to cut it with a knife like he did the rope on the stairs below. Likewise, unless he was a better schemer than Mark Tidd he wouldn't be able to figure out any other place to attack us than right up those stairs. So if he got us there was where he would have to come, and he would have to discover some plan to get down our stairs to climb up.

It might have been easy if he was where he could get tools, but it isn't customary to leave many valuable tools laying around an abandoned hotel, and he didn't have very much to work with. I guess he was a bit dubious himself, for he came and stood where we could see him and called up to us:

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"Ho! up the stairs," says he. "I wish to be speaking and talking with you, eh?"

"Go ahead," says Mark.

"You are tangled up like trap with bunny rabbit in it," says The Man. "Nobody can go away—not at all by any means. Oh no! You are very fast and tight. Is it not without loud arguments so?"

"We're p-p-perfectly comfortable," says Mark. "You haven't seen us t-tryin' to go away, have you?"

"You will surrender up voluntary, eh? There has been fight and bickering plenty for everybody. For boys you have fight like bantam rooster. Oh yes, like everything. Now you are finished up, I believe. Yes?"

"Now we are t-through, you b'lieve? No," says Mark.

"The leetle Japanese boy—the bad, naughty leetle Japanese boy who runnings away from his father—you will now give him to me? In that case of the event nothing shall happen that is not nice. No! no! no! And besides additionally there shall be Christmas gift and handy present for you. Nice, beautiful presents that boys shall like to be owners of."

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"We can wait for Christmas," says Mark.
"We ain't in any hurry for p-p-presents."

"Ah, but butter and bread and vittles, eh? There are stomachs that are lonesome for feed. To be certainly sure. There is thirstiness. It is bad and not a pleasant happening to be thirsty. Suppose I am staying here three days, maybe a week? How is that? You will be starving and thirsting. What then? Eh?"

"Mister," says Mark, "when you're hungry just s-s-send word. We'll be g-glad to lend you some grub. We've got p-plenty to last till you're far, far away."

"You are a pig-head like a mule. You do not listen to commonest sense. No. Must I come to take away the bad leetle Japanese boy?"

"You must if you get him. But so far, lookin' at it from the p-p-point of view of a man that's not int'rested, you 'ain't had much l-l-luck so far."

"I will buy and paying very generous for the leetle boy. How much?"

"We haven't any little boys for sale, mister. And now that 'll be about all. This t-truce is over. If you ain't gone from there by the time I count ten we'll open f-fire. Git!"

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The Man stared up a moment through his one eye-glass and grinned and shrugged his shoulders, but before Mark had counted ten he was out of range.

After that we saw a couple of the enemy go over to the hotel. I expect they were rummaging around for something to use to cut our wire. They must have searched good, for we didn't see them come back for two hours, and one of them had an ax in his hand.

"Much good that'll do 'em," says I. "They can't reach with an ax."

"Shucks!" says Mark. "They can p-p-put a longer handle on it, can't they?"

Which is just what they did. It took quite a while to cut it and get it ready, so that it was after eleven o'clock when they started operations. Then a man came out with the ax on a long handle and commenced chopping at the wire. There was only a crack a couple of inches wide that we could shoot through, and I guess we didn't bother him much. Anyhow, he stayed there and swung his ax on our wires. They were good and tough, but at last he had one cut through. That was the first part of the end of things right

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there. In half an hour the last wire parted and down went the stairs. The way was open—open except for us fellows with our lances and slingshots at the top.

The Man didn't take any chances, though. The first thing he brought up his movable fort, and, sheltered behind it, they began the attack.

"The two-by-four," says Mark. "Be ready."

Four of us grabbed it up and stood holding it till Mark said the word.

"*Now!*" says he, and we aimed the scantling right at the middle of the fort and whanged it with all our might. I'll bet it jarred them good and plenty. Anyhow, they stopped and Mark ran down a couple of steps to pick up the scantling and fix it with one end against their shelter and the other end against a step. They were stopped. They heaved and pushed and strained, but it wasn't any good. They couldn't reach over the top of their fort because they'd built a roof there for their own protection, and there they were. They could push all they wanted to. The more they pushed the more tired they'd get and the more fun we'd have.

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At last they tried lifting their contraption from the bottom and grabbing our brace, but that wasn't any good. We held it just out of reach and peppered every arm that stuck out. Fifteen minutes of that and they saw they were outgeneraled, so they retreated, shelter and all. They had gained a point—the stairs were down; but we had gained a bigger point—we had beaten them off even when they came at us with their patent engine of war. We were pretty tickled, I can tell you.

But The Man wasn't beaten. In twenty minutes he was back again with his fort to make another try. The fort looked just like it looked before, but we soon found out it was different—a whole heap different. We jabbed it with the scantling again, but this time what do you calculate happened! Why, they just dropped off a six-inch board about the middle, backed away an inch or so, grabbed the end of our scantling, and pulled the end through the hole where the board had been. Then they came right on up. It looked like some new kind of spider climbing his thread, for as they came on the scantling went right inside and disappeared like the fort swallowed it.

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Of course we tried to haul the scantling back, but they held on to it. In spite of all our wrenching and jerking and waggling they kept their end and climbed right on slow and sure.

"We're done," says I to Mark.

"Not yet," says he. "Motu, you keep behind."

"No," says Motu. "I will fight side by side with you."

Then Mark spoke short and sharp. "You'll obey orders," says he. "If you're plannin' on b-bein' a warrior you know what orders are. Keep behind."

Motu looked a bit ashamed and awful disappointed, but he did what Mark told him. It must have been hard for him just then, but it was the best plan.

"You'll get all the f-f-fightin' you need pretty quick," says Mark; and Motu smiled back at him.

"When we can't h-hold 'em back any longer," says Mark, "jump through this door and slam it shut. It'll gain a l-little time."

"What's the use gainin' time?" says Binney. "It won't make much difference if we're beat now or in half an hour."

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"A heap of t-t-things can happen in half an hour," says Mark. "We don't give up till we can't hang on one more second."

They were almost on to us now. The fort was at the top step. Plunk jumped to the far side and began jabbing like all-git-out with his lance.

"Good b-boy," says Mark; and then those Japanese just boiled out from behind their fort and came at us. We kept Motu behind and fought the best we could. If it hadn't been for our lances we wouldn't have lasted long, but we kept together in a knot so they couldn't get behind us, and everlastingly poked them with the padded ends of our weapons.

Finally a man dropped sudden to his knees and dived under. He grabbed Plunk and they went to the floor together and rolled over and over, Plunk trying to get away, the man trying to hold him.

"Through the door, quick!" Mark yelled. He knew Plunk wouldn't suffer much damage, but we couldn't afford to lose another man by the same tactics, and we couldn't rescue Plunk. So we jumped backward through the door and just had time to slam it in their

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faces. We didn't get it to stay shut, though, so we could lock it. For the next five minutes it was a question of strength. They pushed in and we pushed out. But there were five of them to four of us and we were boys. Little by little they forced us back until one of them squeezed through.

We had to give back then. The hall was so narrow only two of us could fight abreast, and the luck fell to Mark and Binney. Motu and I got as close behind as we could and used our lances whenever we got a chance. It was pretty hot work, I can tell you. Then Binney turned his ankle and fell, and before he could scramble up the enemy had him.

Now there were just three of us, and they forced us back step by step. The hall was long and narrow. There was no chance to take us on the flank, so they had to come straight on, but they seemed willing enough. Now it was just a matter of time. Pretty soon they would push us back to the end of the hall and close in on us, and we would be done for. After that Motu would be theirs and we would have stood the siege in vain.

Don't think the Japanese were having a

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pleasant time, for they weren't. A boxing-glove can't really hurt you, but it can muss you up a lot, and a good stiff punch will make you see stars. I'll bet there wasn't a man in the lot of them that hadn't seen a whole Fourth of July of fireworks. But they meant business. Nothing could stop them, and on they fought.

Then, before I realized how far we had gone, I backed slam into Motu, who was jammed against the wall. It was our last stand, and we made it a good one. It wasn't long before they had us wedged so tight we couldn't wiggle, and then hands grabbed me. It was all over. Of course I thrashed around the best I could, and I expect the others were doing the same, but it wasn't long before they had me good and fast. It wasn't any use to struggle, so I laid quiet, feeling pretty tired and sore and sorry. And then—and then, would you believe me; but I heard a sound that sent the life and courage back into me with a jump.

"Listen, Mark!" I yelled.

"I heard it, Tallow," says he.

The Japanese heard it, too, for they looked pretty startled and stared at each other.

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Then we heard the sound again. It was the toot of an automobile horn. The kind of horn you hear on great big sixty-horse-power cars.

"Whoop!" I yelled. "It ain't over yet!"

The Japanese were listening, and for a minute my man didn't hang on to me as tight as he ought to. I gave a sudden wrench and rolled out from under him. Before he could lay hands on me again I was up and running down that hall faster than the man who won the hundred-yard dash in the Olympic games.

I plunged out of the door and threw myself down-stairs. The Japanese was right at my heels, but at the ground floor he stopped, for just across the bridge was a whopping-big car with seven or eight men in it, some white, some Japanese, and just getting out was a little Japanese gentleman with a tall silk hat and a frock-coat.

"Hey!" I yelled. "You're just in time! Quick!"

In a minute the whole of them were out of the car and hurrying toward me.

CHAPTER XXII

THE little Japanese gentleman kept ahead in spite of his silk hat and frock-coat. When he got to me he grabbed me by the arm and shook me.

"Where is he?" he says, his voice shaking with worry and excitement. "Has harm come to him?"

"No," says I, "but it was comin' rapid when I saw him last. Bring on your army."

I turned and ran toward the citadel, with the whole pack of them at my heels. Just as we got to the bridge The Man Who Will Come, with a couple of his men at his back, came tearing down-stairs, but as soon as they saw the reinforcements they stopped and hesitated and then began to climb back again.

The little Japanese gentleman shouted something in an angry voice and put on more steam, so that he passed me and got to the stairs first. We all ran up in a crowd. For a minute The Man stood at the top as though

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he'd make a fight for it, but panic got him, I guess, and he turned like he'd lost his head, and tried to scoot three ways at once.

We pounded right up and two of our Japanese grabbed him by the arms. He didn't even struggle. Three of his followers huddled back in a corner of the gallery, glowering and sullen, but frightened, and the reinforcements attended to them.

"Where is he?" the little Japanese gentleman demanded, and I pointed through the door just as Mark and Motu shoved the fourth of The Man's men out of the way and stepped into sight. Then a surprising thing happened.

The dignified little Japanese gentleman, silk hat and frock-coat and all, went right down on his knees and bowed so his face was almost rubbing against the boards, and in a strangled voice said something in their own language to Motu, who stopped with the greatest look of surprise at sight of him. Then Motu stood still and drew himself up to his full height, and smiled. It's hard to say just how he looked, but I guess stately is the only word for it. He looked like a boy who was used to having folks go down on their

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knees and rub their noses in the splinters for him.

He said something to the little Japanese gentleman, who got up on his feet, his face working and his eyes blinking as if he was so happy he was about to cry. •

"It is well you have come," Motu says to him in English. "The ears of my serene uncle shall hear how you arrived—and there shall be fresh honors and distinctions for one who already stands among the foremost."

"You are safe? You are untouched by the hands of these pigs? If one has so much as defiled your sacred person with the touch of a finger—"

"Good friend," says Motu, with a gentle smile, "we are in America."

"True." The little gentleman glared back at The Man and his army. "Here they are safe. But let them once return to their home—!"

"That shall be their punishment," says Motu. "Never again in life shall they set foot on the shores of our land; never shall their unworthy eyes gaze on its beauties, never again behold the majesty of sacred Fuji Yama. In foreign lands, far from the

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graves of their ancestors, shall they pass away, and in their native villages their names shall be spoken with bitter words and reviling. That is my will in the matter." While Motu spoke his face had been stern, but not cruel or vindictive. He had spoken like a great and just judge passing sentence on the guilty.

Now he turned to us—the four of us, for Plunk and Binney were with us again, rumpled and battered a bit, with their clothes ready to go into the rag-bag.

"My friends," says he, "let me present to you Count Takisuji, minister from the Imperial Court of Japan to the United States."

Well, sir, you could have bought me for a cent. Here was a boy smaller than me, and a foreign minister went down on his knees and risked getting a sliver in his nose at sight of him. I felt all fluffy inside. None of us had ever seen a great man before—a man great enough to be the representative of an empire at the capital of our country—and now that we saw him we discovered we'd been hobnobbing with and bossing and fooling around with a fellow that such a man bowed and scraped to. It was sure amazing.

Motu went on speaking: "These four,

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Count," says he, "are the best and bravest friends I have ever known. They came upon me in trouble—a foreigner, poor, wearing the clothes I now wear. But they asked no questions, sought no reward, befriended me out of the largeness of their hearts for the honor of their fatherland. Motu I was to them, and nothing more—a poor Japanese boy who needed friends. They took me in, fed me, gave me lodging. Then when he came"—here Motu nodded toward The Man Who Will Come—"they fought for me—fought for me like warriors of ancient days when men were greater and wiser and stronger than they are to-day." Then he set to and told them the whole story from beginning to end. He didn't omit a thing. He told about Mark Tidd's strategy and about my swimming and about the bravery and faithfulness of Binney and Plunk, and everything. Then he introduced each of us by name.

"Here," says he, "is Mark Tidd, our general. But for the wisdom and cunning of his brain your coming would have been useless."

"There wouldn't have been any comin'," says I, forgetting myself and interrupting.

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The count frowned, but Motu smiled and asked why.

Then I told him about the letter Mark wrote to the Japanese minister, and how he had figured out that Motu was somebody important.

The minister nodded. "It was the letter brought me," says he.

"I might have known," says Motu. "Who but Mark Tidd could have brought you? But how did he send the letter, Tallow?"

Now that was embarrassing. I didn't want to do any bragging about myself, and I muttered under my breath, and got red and felt like I was standing close to a furnace. Out of the tail of my eye I saw Mark Tidd grin. He knew how I was feeling, all right.

"It was like this, Motu," says he; and again I saw the count frown, but Motu shook his head at him. "Tallow s-s-sneaked off the other night and swam the l-lake with the letter, and got a man to mail it. He was just swimmin' back again when the enemy made a l-landin' on our island."

Motu bowed to me as natural and graceful as could be, and I tried to bow back, but I

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was pretty clumsy about it. We don't have much practice in that sort of politeness here, which, maybe, isn't any credit to us.

"It was a fine deed, a brave deed, Tallow. The story of that swim, the story of your dive from the balcony, shall not die."

He went on introducing us, and the minister shook hands with each of us.

"They are of the Samurai," says Motu, and the count raised his eyebrows with surprise. I couldn't see why then, but later I found out. "Each of them, Count, is entitled to wear the short sword and to see the face of majesty."

"Maybe," says the count, "it would be well to tell these young men for whom they have been fighting. In these days when your secret was not known they have grown familiar. It did no harm, but now—it is not seemly for them, or for you."

Motu smiled again and patted Mark on the shoulder. "Always it shall be as it is now. To these four I shall be Motu, their true friend and companion in dangers. They shall speak to me by no title, nor shall they bow to me or treat me otherwise than as one of themselves—an American boy. So shall I be

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proud to be known and accepted. But you may tell them, Count, who I am."

The count bowed low. "His highness is kind beyond the power of words to express. You have been honored as few have been honored, yet I, Count Takisuji, say it is deserved. Him whom you have served is his Highness, Prince Motu, nephew to his Ineffable Majesty, Emperor of Japan."

"Whee!" says I, half under my breath, "but we caught a big fish."

Motu laughed. "But remember," says he, "to you I am still Motu—always I shall be but Motu, your true friend, forever at your service."

Mark Tidd was squinting his little eyes and wrinkling his stub of a nose.

"I d-don't want to act like I was curious," says he, "but what in t-t-tunket is a royal p-prince doin' alone in the mountains here? From what I've read of princes it ain't exactly a habit with them to be ten t-thousand miles from home alone, in borrowed pants."

"You shall know, Mark Tidd, for it is your right. The story reflects small credit on a part of my countrymen. You know, Mark, that of late there has been talk of war between

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your land and mine. It has made the heart of my uncle heavy with sorrow, for he knows much of your United States and his friendship is truly yours. But misunderstandings have arisen. Our people have been inflamed against you by men who are no better than traitors. Your people have been made to feel bitter against us. Even those in power at Washington and in Tokio have been led astray. But his Majesty, my uncle, was not led astray, and he knew your President was wise and just. So, saying nothing to any, he sent me, his relative, as a special and personal envoy to your President with words and assurances of peace. A message he gave to my keeping which would assure your President that a lasting peace depended on you alone." He stopped and thought a moment, then went on: "But my mission was discovered by traitors who desire war because it will be of profit to them. They want to see battle-ships built and cannon manufactured—and men slain. Well they knew the state of the public mind, how a spark might cause an explosion that even the Emperor could not withstand. With me they planned to make that spark.

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"In my land," says Motu, "the people are kind to me; they have given me their affection. It is good. So these traitors said to themselves, if harm comes to Prince Motu in the United States there will be war. The people will lay the blame on the United States, and peace will be destroyed. So they made their plot.

"I came with but two attendants. None knew my name. As a simple Japanese boy I traveled. I came across your country for days; then, one night as I stood on a little station platform while the train stood still, The Man with his followers seized me quietly and carried me away. What happened thereafter I do not know, except what has happened to me. They brought me to these places and here I escaped a week before you came. I traveled miles on foot and found refuge in this old hotel. Then you came. That is the story. So, you see, you have served not only Motu, your friend, but your land and my land."

The count nodded gravely. "It has been kept secret in Japan—your disappearance—but I have been informed, and secretly I have made search for you. Your followers came

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to me, but could give no aid. Not until the letter of Mark Tidd came did I have hope; then with all speed I came here. As the representative of my country, young men, I wish to thank you for the service you have rendered her."

"We didn't do it on purpose," says Mark. "It didn't m-make any difference whether Motu was a prince or a day laborer, he was in a bad fix, and it looked like it was our d-d-duty to stick by him. He wouldn't have thought much of the United States if we hadn't—now, would he? We just did by him like we'd like to have Japanese boys do by us if we got in a scrape over there."

"It is a sentiment reflecting credit on the teaching of your fathers and on the ideals of your country," says the count.

There was quite a bit more palavering, which ended up by Motu asking us to come on with him to the count's summer home and stay there. He said he'd have to scoot down to Washington, but would be back in a day or two. We talked it over, and Motu persuaded us.

"We've got to see Mr. Ames, who owns the h-h-hotel," says Mark. "It's been

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damaged some. We've got to take care of that."

"That shall be my care," says the count. "He shall be amply paid for all harm."

Motu was looking at The Man and his followers. Of a sudden he took a step toward them:

"Punishment of the body you escape because of the nature of this matter, but punishment of the soul you shall not escape. One and all you are traitors to your land, and you"—he pointed scornfully at The Man—"are the most despicable because if you would you could be of value to your emperor. You have cast aside your honor and your manhood. Your names shall be spoken with loathing. My sentence you have heard—never again shall you see or set foot on the soil of your native land. Now go."

Not one of them opened his mouth, but every one scurried off as fast as he could travel. Probably they were afraid Motu might change his mind and boil them in oil, or do whatever disagreeable thing is customary in such cases over in Japan.

They didn't take the road, but started to break and run into the woods. But they

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didn't. Just then something more unexpected than a Japanese minister happened. Those woods all of a sudden came to life. The bushes just fairly seethed and out came charging about twenty of the biggest farmers—good old American farmers—I ever saw. And every one of them had his sleeves rolled up for business. Behind them, on foot this time, came the old fellow with the mule. Mark was right. That old fellow had gone off and given warning.

What Motu said to The Man about escaping punishment of the body was considerable of a mistake. I should say it was. Those big farmers just came down on The Man and his followers like a roof was falling on them. Why, the Japanese didn't have a chance even to start to fight back. In about two seconds every last one of them was grabbed and held fast by a couple of men in overalls. The farmers led their prisoners over toward us.

"Howdy!" said the man that was ahead. "Heard as how there was some furriners botherin' boys over here, so we come to see."

"Much obliged," says Mark. And he introduced the farmers to Motu and the count,

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and you can guess those farmers were pretty surprised. They don't bump into a minister and a real live prince every day. But it didn't flabbergast them any. No, sir. I was proud of them. Somehow they seemed to get dignified and to look like somebody in particular. I didn't understand it for a minute, but pretty soon I saw what it was—it was good American citizenship. They knew who and what they were and they were proud of it. Princes or ministers couldn't make them feel ashamed, for they knew in their hearts that princes and ministers were just men like themselves.

"What 'll we do with these here vermin?" asked the leader of the farmers.

"I have granted that they go free," said Motu, "but they are forever banished from Japan."

"Um . . ." said the farmer. "So far's *you* go, that's all right. What they done to you you can overlook if you want to. But so far as these kids go, it's a different thing. These Japanese men have bothered, and, so far's I kin see, tried actually to *harm*, these American boys. Wa-al, us men don't stand by to see leetle fellers nor wimmin — nor anybody

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harmed if we can help it. Seems like we're *bound* to do somethin'."

Motu bowed. "The matter is in your hands," he said. There was a twinkle in his eye, too.

The farmers talked together a minute. Then they carried their prisoners out on our dock. One farmer got ahold of the head and one of the feet of The Man. "One, two, three," called out the leader, and The Man went whirling through the air, head over heels, till he splashed down in the lake. Right after him came one of his men. As fast as one crawled back on to the dock the farmers would jerk him up and duck him again. I laughed till I almost busted my belt. Even the Japanese minister was smiling a little.

"That's enough," said the farmers' leader in a few minutes. "Now turn 'em loose—after 'em! Chase 'em! Don't forgit you've got toes to your boots!"

Off scooted the Japanese—pretty nearly drowned, I expect—and right on their heels swooped the farmers. They didn't forget the toes on their boots, either. Every once in a while one of them would swing up his leg and

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catch a Japanese right where his pants were tight—and that Japanese would pretty nearly double the distance he was planning on for the next jump. We watched them, our sides aching so we didn't dare laugh again, until they disappeared.

"American justice," said the count, his eyes all twinkly. "We do it differently in Japan—but maybe we could learn from you. . . . It has the advantage of being sudden."

We got in the big automobile and went to the count's summer home and stayed there three weeks. Then we had to go home, and so did Motu. We felt pretty bad when we said good-by to him, for, after all, we were just boys and he was a prince away off in Japan, so we wouldn't be likely ever to see him again.

But he said he would see us and would write to us. "Three times a year I shall write until the last year of your lives and mine. Nor must our hearts be sad at this parting, for fear we not meet again, for I, Motu, promise you we shall meet, and here is my hand on it."

We got aboard the train and then stood waving to him and the count as long as we

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could see them. Pretty soon we went in and sat down and didn't speak for a long time. We were thinking about the whole adventure, and what it had meant to us and to our countries.

"It beats all," says Mark, after a while, "how h-h-history gets made or don't get m-made. Who'd ever think we fellows had headed off a war with Japan?"

"Nobody," says I.

Well, we got back to Wicksville, and in a couple of months the whole thing seemed like a dream. I was beginning to think it was a dream when one day what should happen but word from Mark Tidd to come right to his house. I hurried over and found Plunk and Binney and a Japanese gentleman from Washington there. He was some sort of attaché of the legation, and, you won't believe it, but he had for each of us a piece of parchment covered with Japanese writing and big gold seals. He told us they made us some sort of nobles in Japan, and regular Samurai warriors. Besides that there was a present for each of us from Motu—beautiful short swords like the one of his we found that day at the hotel. They were all carved on the

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handles and engraved on the blades, and Motu's note said they were hundreds of years old and had been carried by four of Japan's greatest warriors. The note ended up:

Many men have worn these swords since they were forged, but none will own them more worthily than my four American boy friends. Whenever you look on these swords think of your friend Motu, who speaks your names every day and counts the hours till he shall see you again.

"I hope we do see him sometime," says I.

"You bet," says Mark Tidd. "B-bein' a prince never hurt him a bit. I never knew a boy I liked better."

"Nor me," says I.

Then the messenger gave us another note, addressed to all of us on paper from the White House. It was short, but there was a name at the end of it that made it more valuable than a hundred pages from anybody else—for that name was the name of the President.

MY DEAR FRIENDS [says the note],—You have served your country well in the matter we know of, and your country thanks you. As your President I like to think there are thousands of American boys who would have acted as truly and wisely and bravely as you did.

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Then he signed his name.

After the messenger was gone and we had talked things over for a while I says:

"Where'll we go next summer, fellows?"

"I d-don't know," says Mark Tidd. "We planned a quiet vacation this time, and see what we got. L-let's plan a wild-West sort of outing next year, or a p-pirate cruise, or a t-trip up the Amazon among savages. Then we'll probably end up by having a comfortable, undisturbed, cozy t-time. Things seem to go by contraries."

"But this one was a mighty interestin' contrary," says Plunk. And we all agreed with him.

THE END





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Damage Back
cover